Dispatching for Dollars

How to Manage Your Logistics and Dispatch Your Way to Efficiency and Profitability

Another Great “How to Build a Million Dollar Medical Transportation Company” Resource!
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About Me

First, let me congratulate you on investing in this resource. I’ve put a great deal of thought, time, and effort into developing this resource in an effort to help you become the best possible dispatcher you can be.

Why is it so important that you become the best possible dispatcher? Because dispatchers are absolutely the first point of contact for your business AND an efficient, well organized dispatcher is absolutely essential to maintaining a profitable service.

This resource has been inspired by the many clients from around the country that have invested in Joel’s Million Dollar information. In assisting Joel, I have had the pleasure to meet, speak and work with so many of you and I continue to enjoy the relationships that we continue to build with all of you. Therefore, Dispatching for Dollars has been created with all of you in mind. I want you and your business to be as efficient, profitable, and effective as ours!

Since joining Joel in July of 2002 I have learned a great deal about the medical transportation industry, business in general, and yes, dispatching! If you’ve attended one of Joel’s Million Dollar Seminars or invested in his Seminar DVD Series you probably heard him mention how I started working for him on a part-time basis. Needless to say, this is true!

I was initially hired to manage Joel’s accounts receivables. Joel was so overwhelmed because he was busy hustling and making more money but all the while he was failing to collect his money on the backend. And trust me, when I first arrived, there were a lot of receivables to collect on the backend – approximately $80,000 worth of overdue invoices alone! Joel was so busy it was getting him further and further behind. And thus, I was brought on board to help out.

I was working hard and doing my best to collect his money. And before long, Joel was offering to expand my hours, my roles and responsibilities. I accepted these new responsibilities because I enjoyed the work and, quite frankly, it was more money! If I
Dispatching for Dollars with Kathryn J. Thayer

recall correctly, it was within about six months that I was working almost full-time and learning a great deal about Joel’s business and this industry as a whole.

Long story short, within a short period of time I was managing Joel’s accounts receivables, accounts payables, payroll and more. Clearly, he recognized that I was loyal and willing to work hard. And because I had a close working relationship with the two full-time dispatchers it was becoming more and more natural for me to gradually learn some of the many dispatching skills and responsibilities.

Unfortunately, one day it was discovered that one of our dispatchers was stealing from Joel causing him to terminate her employment. As a result, Joel offered me that new position IN ADDITION to my existing roles and responsibilities! Honestly, I was a bit hesitant at first because I thought it was going to be overwhelming. But again, I enjoyed working for Joel and our overall work environment. So I accepted the dispatching position, some additional hours, and a nice raise!

In time, Joel promoted me to Office Manager and Head Dispatcher. And I’m very proud to say that as Joel continues to say to this day, “I shattered his thoughts and expectations!” The reason is because when I accepted this new position I immediately focused on making us an even more efficient “operating system.”

Since taking the position we have increased our profit margin in so many ways to include some of the following:

1. We streamlined our payroll and more astutely managed our labor hours. We even eliminated one of our office positions
2. We eliminated many unprofitable trips and continue to add more strategically profitable transports
3. We more closely managed our mileage, time clock, and maintenance related issues so that our “down-time” is limited

So based upon my experience, am I the world’s best dispatcher? Who knows! But what I do know is that since becoming a dispatcher and Joel’s Office Manager I have learned a great deal! And that’s what I want to share with you now. I want you to learn some of
the many strategies that have allowed our business to be an efficient, profitable service. I want you to perfect your dispatching skills so that you can more astutely and effectively meet the needs of your customers.

So again, I congratulate you on using this resource. I really believe that if you use the strategies and techniques that I outline here that both you and your business are going to become much improved and much more profitable.

So without further ado, let’s get started!
I know this might sound a bit poetic, but I truly believe that being an effective dispatcher starts by knowing your purpose. You have to firmly understand the capabilities of your company, what your mission is within the company, and how your efforts affect and influence the company. And if you’re a growing company, you have that much more to consider in regards to your personal responsibilities and the capabilities of your growing company.

One of your personal responsibilities is to literally set the tone for your office and the overall effectiveness of your service. Driver’s will come in and then disperse throughout your community executing the company mission. During their shifts drivers will have minimal interaction with one another. So if a driver is having a bad day, for whatever reason, his demeanor is somewhat isolated.

Conversely, as the dispatcher, you’ll be in direct contact with all your drivers and the customers whom call your office. Thus, your attitude and demeanor has the ability to influence everyone within and outside your company. If you have a poor attitude, everyone will pick up on it and do their best to avoid you. Drivers will dislike you and resent having to listen to you. Customers will hang up having a poor experience with you.

But, if you have a good, positive, helpful, and encouraging attitude your drivers and customers will feed off of your energy. Drivers will have less of a problem following your instructions and your customers will welcome the opportunity to speak with you again.

So from the outset, let me state clearly that one of your greatest purposes and necessities in being an effective dispatcher is to set the tone and maintain a positive and encouraging demeanor.
Another very important responsibility that I encourage all dispatchers to take seriously is managing the temperament of your drivers. Does this mean that you’re a babysitter? No, absolutely not! But it does mean that you’re a regulator!

Everyone has different personalities and motivations. And this is no different when it comes to drivers. But, you always have to make sure that you’re in 100% control of all business situations when it comes to your drivers.

An effective transportation company is “run” by the dispatcher, not the drivers. Therefore, YOU have to tell your drivers where to go – not the other way around. You tell your drivers whom to pick up. You tell your drivers when to take breaks. You tell your drivers when to gas up. You give all duty related directions to your drivers. Failing to do so creates indecision and independence which only leads to confusion and chaos; intangibles which are counterproductive to your company’s mission.

There have been times in the past where a driver will cop a poor attitude or simply fail to follow simple instructions from us, the dispatchers. And needless to say, a belligerent driver is an ineffective driver. A driver with an attitude is a problem and not a solution.

Under such circumstance, my first response is to encourage the driver to re-evaluate his attitude. I’ll remind the driver that his/her abrasive attitude is inappropriate, not necessary, nor welcome. Further, if the problem persists I will not hesitate to pull the driver off the road and send him/her home early.

And the great thing about this aggressive and assertive posture is that Joel gives me and our other dispatchers free autonomy to make such a decision. If a driver really projects a poor or confrontational attitude, for whatever reason, we will pull him/her off the road and simply find a way to make due with existing drivers.

Being a Lifeline

But effective dispatchers are much more than someone whom only gives orders and directions. Dispatchers also serve as a type of “lifeline” for each driver on duty. As we’ll
continue to discuss, drivers will periodically find themselves in situations where they need your help. And needless to say, you have to find a way to help!

It may be something as simple as calling ahead and finding a room number for a patient that your driver is transferring from a hospital to a nursing home. Or, it can be something as serious as calling the police because a driver either witnessed or was involved in an accident. Regardless of the situation, knowing your role starts by understanding that you serve a critical role for each driver.

**Being a Mentor**

Part of your role as a responsible dispatcher also includes being a mentor and teacher. You not only direct the drivers throughout the day, but you’re actually one of the primary instructors for teaching new drivers on how to do their job. Will you teach them how to perform the actual transport; how to load and unload wheelchairs, stretchers, and more? No, probably not, unless you too were once a driver.

But if you’re like me, never served as a driver and only office personnel, then you’ll most likely be responsible for orienting new drivers to your company’s office related policies and procedures.

I thoroughly explain to all new drivers how to properly check in at the beginning of their shift, sign out their vehicle and necessary equipment, and how to recheck all company related equipment at the end of their shift. I also take the time to sit and meet with each driver at the outset of their hiring to thoroughly explain what is expected of them as a driver and how to properly interact with our dispatchers and fellow employees.

Throughout the beginning days and weeks of a new driver’s hiring you’ll also probably find yourself explaining the particulars of each facility and location. Much of this is done by the senior drivers responsible for training new drivers. But it’s natural as the dispatcher to explain to drivers where specific doctor offices are located, which entrance to use, where certain residences are located, and much more.
Ironically enough, chances are also very good that you might be the mentor and instructor for other dispatchers, especially if you're a growing business. If you're the primary dispatcher for a young, small company you'll most likely be hiring more dispatchers as the business grows. So again, chances are very good that you're going to be a dispatcher AND a mentor/instructor to other dispatchers that you might be working with.
Accept Being a Problem Solver

Let me start by reminding you that the transportation business is a very fluid situation. Thus, you absolutely have to maintain a very flexible mentality. If you don’t, you’ll lose your sanity! And I mean this seriously. You have to be prepared for crisis management. And as your business grows you have to become more and more flexible and able to think more spontaneously and decisively.

So let’s start by talking about for whom you’re a problem solver.

Customers

First, you’re a problem solver for your customers. As Joel says, you’re in business simply because you’re solving someone’s problem. And this is true. The customer has a problem, you help them solve it, and they compensate you accordingly. In short, that’s how your business is going to make money. But what exactly is the problem that your customers have? They have to safely get to an appointment on time and then returned. And this is obviously where your service comes into play.

But realistically, providing transportation service per say isn’t really the problem. Rather, the problem that you’ll be working to manage on a daily basis is how you’re going to safely and efficiently get your client to his/her appointment on time while having many, many more clients that need transports at similar times?

Anyone can dispatch one or two vehicles. But it’s a whole new situation and set of circumstances when you’re dispatching 5, 10, 20, 30 and more vehicles. It’s the whole fluid juggling act that you need to manage that poses challenges.

The obvious reason why juggling drivers and customers can be challenging is because you need all your clients to get to their appointments on time and your schedule can get quite busy. But from a business perspective, the concern is that you don’t lose any
money by having to turn down calls or by being late and, thus, possibly losing some customers! You don’t want clients to be late and risk upsetting and possibly losing them to a competitor. Further, you don’t want to miss out on any new business; new reservations that you receive during the business day.

**Turning down calls or being late for calls simply isn’t good for business.** When you turn down business or you’re repeatedly late for transports it won’t take long before you become known as the “late guy on the block” – a very undesirable reputation.

Let me jump ahead for a moment to give you an example of how we work to be problem solvers for our customers.

First, in regards to our service, it is our company policy NEVER to outright say “No” to a person attempting to set up a legitimate transport. I say legitimate because periodically someone will call you and try and negotiate your rates down to nothing. This is definitely not an option.

We do not negotiate our rates. If you do this once I can promise you that it won’t take long to create the reputation amongst nursing homes and more that you’re rates are subject for negotiations. So, I strongly recommend that you do not ever negotiate your fixed rates. Out of town transport, possibly, but not your “in-town,” standard transports.

Getting back to my point, when someone contacts our office to schedule a transport, we never outright say “No” or deny the transport if we’re completely booked. Rather, what we do is we propose a different time and, thus, are always working to propose solutions.

For example, if someone wanted a same-day transport at 11:00 AM but we are booked across the board I would give the person a more feasible time. Instead of 11:00 o’clock I might be able to tell them we can do it at 10:30 AM or 11:30 AM.

Now realistically, this proposed solution may not be the customer’s ideal time, but by immediately offering a proposed time they see that we’re trying to work with them; we’re trying to create a feasible solution to their problem. Again, your proposed solution(s) may not work for the customer or the facility and they may have to say “No,” but at least
it instills in their mind that you're attempting to work with them. And that does create a lasting impression with your clients as being a problem solver. But from personal experience, I can assure you that it's far better to let the client say "No" rather than you.

Drivers

I don’t think anyone can count high enough on just how many times or how frequently you, as the dispatcher, will have to assist in solving problems for your drivers. As I mentioned previously, you will serve as a type of “lifeline” for your drivers on duty. It’s not uncommon for drivers to find themselves in situations for which they’re unsure how to handle. You need to be able to act quickly and provide them with a proposed solution; a solution that best meets the needs of the company, the driver, and the client.

Drivers can be held up in facilities for a variety of reasons. The patient may not be ready when your driver arrives. When this happens it can definitely be an inconvenience to you because it can throw off your timing. And sometimes it’s not even the patient’s fault, rather, it might be that the staff forgot or simply failed to get the patient ready. Other times, it may not be the fault of either the patient or the staff.

Occasionally, we’ll have a driver literally get stuck on a hospital floor and can’t get out! The reason is because an emergency occurred somewhere on a floor(s) and the hospital initiated a “Code Red” and literally locks down the floors. They prevent anyone from leaving or coming on to a floor.

So if you have a driver literally stuck on a floor and can’t leave do you think it’s going to effect your plans? You bet! So in being a problem solver you have to quickly adjust your schedule without getting flustered and without making other clients late to their appointments.

And let me use this example as an opportunity to jump ahead and reiterate the importance that you’re using a two-cell radio for your dispatching needs. A hand held two-way radio is a huge convenience! Drivers can carry them on their hip into facilities allowing the two of you quick and convenient communication. Image how difficult it
would be for you to assess the situation if/when your driver gets stuck on a floor that’s locked down due to a “Code Red.”

Other examples of problems that you’re going to have to help solve for your drivers include, but are not limited to, maintenance, accidents, equipment related issues, and much, much more.

Periodically, drivers will contact you during their shift and tell you that they’re experiencing a maintenance issue with their vehicle. Or, maybe they’re having a problem with their lift, a stretcher, a door, or something else.

A driver might contact you with a patient related issue. The driver has arrived at a nursing facility and the patient may be refusing to go. Possibly, the patient is suffering from dementia and they’re creating a problem. Or, maybe your driver is stuck waiting for an aide to accompany the driver and the patient on the transport. There could be a host of reasons why a driver would contact you with a patient related problem.

Regardless of all the possibilities, the greatest advice I could possibly give you is for you to have predetermined contingency plans. Joel goes into great detail about establishing contingency plans in his Million Dollar ebook and his Seminar DVD Series. But it’s so important that I have to stress this point again here.

Problems are inevitable, regardless of your type of business or industry. But it is contingency plans and emergency plans that will help you to operate efficiently and navigate through your problems without losing your sanity.

Contingency Plans

Contingency plans are different than emergency plans. Contingency plans include strategies for personnel issues, customer problems, and vehicle problems.

For example, what will you do when a driver or dispatcher calls in sick? One strategy that we use in our company is to have what we call a “Swing Man.” A swing man is a
person that can drive when necessary yet, when we don’t need a driver, is well versed
enough with our dispatching policies so that he/she can work in the office. Over the
years we’ve had both male and females serve as a “Swing Man.”

This is one strategy that I strongly encourage you to work to implement; a Swing Man.

Such a strategy has served us well over the years and continues to benefit our business
and I am sure that it will help you. Think of what an inconvenience it would be for you to
set a daily schedule and then find out first thing in the morning that a driver is too sick to
work. The best and fastest solution is for your Swing Man to leave the office and serve
as a replacement driver until either the full-time driver has returned or another driver,
possibly a part-time driver, can fill the absence.

Contingency plans also include vehicle and equipment problems. What’s your strategy
for a vehicle that breaks down during the day? If it can’t be driven, how will you get it to
the shop for repairs? Will you have it towed? Who will you call? Do you have an
account set up and arrangements made to bill you or do you have to be inconvenienced
and pay upfront? How will you compensate for this loss of this vehicle until it can be
repaired and back on the road?

Emergency Plans

Emergency plans are tactics that you’re going to employ when something serious has
occurred to protect your people and business and to hopefully restore order to an
immediate situation.

An emergency situation might include, but is not limited to, vehicular accidents or
something serious associated with a customer or driver. And let’s be realistic. Accidents are bound to happen, especially as your business grows. The more drivers, vehicles, and customers you have the greater your exposure to accidents.

The first thing I recommend doing is establishing an emergency contact list to be posted
in your office, by the phone, and to be carried with your drivers. Our emergency contact
lists are laminated and literally posted on the cover of each equipment box that drivers sign out when starting their shift. This list includes contact numbers for police, ambulance, all hospitals, emergency rooms, nursing homes, and cell phones of key personnel both in our company and of support services for facilities we frequent often.

Next, your company has to develop systematic strategies for how to handle and respond to emergencies.

For example, if one of our vehicles is involved in an accident, regardless of who is at fault, right away either I or our Director of Operations leaves the office to go to the scene of the accident to take pictures with a digital camera. While there we also work with the police to exchange insurance information and gather whatever info as necessary to help resolve the issue.

Also, whenever there is any type of accident, regardless of how minor, and a patient is involved, we do everything possible to get statements from witnesses and the patient involved. Some people shy away from wanting to make a statement because they think that they’re committed to something. But if you can get statements from witnesses in addition to that of your driver I strongly encourage you to do so.

Fortunately, all accidents that our drivers have been involved in have by somewhat minor; typically fender-benders. And ironically enough, most of the time these accidents are caused by people rear-ending us because our drivers are moving slower when patients are on board!

However, this past Christmas season we had a driver pick up a dialysis patient in the early morning hours heading to dialysis. Our driver had the right of way when all of a sudden a police car T-boned the passenger side of the vehicle! Of all people, our vehicle was struck by a police officer that failed to yield at a stop sign! Rather than stopping he just flashed his lights and proceeded to roll through the stop sign. He didn’t even have his siren on to give our driver a chance to stop and avoid him.

Long story short, the Police Department was trying to be very standoffish. Initially, they actually tried to say that our driver was somehow at fault. But what proved to be a big
help for us was the testimony and written statement from our passenger. She was very adamant that our driver had the right of way, was not speeding, and was doing everything appropriately.

Joel went back and forth with the police department and, after complaining to the mayor’s office, justice was finally served. The police accepted responsibility and, after getting estimates, the City of Binghamton compensated us just over $2000 in damages.

But going back to how this particular accident influenced our emergency plans and policies, our passenger’s written statements proved to be critical. Without her statement we suspect that the accident would have been more of a “he said she said” type scenario and we would have been on the losing end. Based upon the police department’s hostile posture we’re confident they would have worked to bully us into taking a loss.
Be Assertive

We’ve established that an effective dispatcher is an effective problem solver. And because you’ll be serving as the “gatekeeper” of your business, do you think it’s at all feasible for you to be timid or a type of pushover? Do you think you’ll gain any respect from your drivers if you let them walk all over you or they dictate what they’ll be doing versus you directing them? Believe it or not, I’ve seen it happen!

Drivers

Joel had to discharge his very first dispatcher for just such a reason. It’s not that she didn’t care, it’s not that she wasn’t experienced, it’s not that she didn’t want to work, not that she was belligerent, and not that she didn’t understand this business. Rather, it was simply because she was a huge pushover when it came to the drivers.

She was an incredibly nice person, so much so that she couldn’t talk harsh or firm to anyone. And unfortunately, this resulted in drivers telling her what vehicles they wanted, what trips they wanted, and more. So instead of her being in control, she was being controlled.

Joel spoke with her, worked with her, and tried to coach her along but she simply couldn’t adjust. She didn’t have what it takes to be assertive so Joel eventually reached his breaking point and had to let her go. It was a tough decision, but it had to be done.

Being assertive includes being decisive, willing to make difficult decisions, and doing so despite not being considered popular.

Let’s be realistic. Everyone wants to be liked. But in being assertive you have to make decisions that best serve the company mission and not that of individual drivers - despite how you’re perceived by drivers.
Can you be friendly with your drivers? Absolutely, and you should be! It promotes good relations, team spirit, and a healthy business culture. Just because you direct your drivers and literally tell them where to go doesn’t mean that you can’t be friendly. BUT, you cannot allow drivers to dictate terms to you while on the job.

Some of the areas for which you’ll have to maintain complete control include which transports your drivers perform, their schedules, what vehicles they’ll be using, what equipment they need, and more. Because these areas are so important, let’s talk about them individually.

**Vehicles**

In our business, drivers do not operate the same vehicles everyday. Some businesses do this, allow drivers to keep the same vehicle everyday. But from past experience we absolutely do not. Drivers may operate a particular vehicle for a few days, but at no time do we allow drivers to monopolize any one particular vehicle.

The reason for this is because we want all of our drivers to be well versed and familiar with the particulars of every vehicle in our fleet. Not all our vehicles are the same. Many have different capabilities. Therefore, the last thing we want is a driver to get into a vehicle that they don’t like or are not familiar with and ask them to transport clients. Doing so would be unsafe for our clients and our drivers.

In the past, we have allowed drivers to keep the same vehicles everyday. The theory was that individual drivers would take ownership of “their” vehicles and would work extra hard to keep it clean and well maintained.

But unfortunately, we discovered that when a vehicle was down for repairs or whatever the circumstances were that forced us to put drivers in different vehicles it became a real problem with our capabilities. Some drivers were uncomfortable and it effected their/our time and efficiency.
So my suggestion to you, and this is entirely up to you, do not let drivers monopolize any one particular vehicles. Rather, I suggest that you force your drivers to be well versed with all the vehicles and equipment in your fleet and have them focusing on performing their job effectively rather than what vehicle they will or will not be operating.

Specific Transports

I’ve had the pleasure to meet and work with many of Joel’s clients from around the country. Of those clients, I’ve spoken with a few that started their business and they were facing various problems with drivers performing transports.

What many of these entrepreneurs were doing was allowing drivers to pick and choose which transports they’ll perform. Also, they would assign drivers a number of transports and that’s it, those clients were assigned to a specific driver regardless of the status of the driver. If the driver was running late or was held up, it didn’t matter, they were still assigned the same transports.

We’ll be going into greater detail very soon in regards to transports and logistics so I don’t want to “jump the gun” too much. But you have to understand that YOU, the dispatcher, have to maintain 100% control over which drivers are going to transport which clients throughout the course of business day. You can’t simply assign clients to drivers randomly, put it on autopilot, and then just walk away! Dispatchers have to be engaged with directing drivers every moment during the business day.

The only transports that drivers are guaranteed to perform are the early morning transports that are assigned and performed prior to our office opening. Once our office is opened, our dispatch takes over and begins to manage all traffic. I strongly suggest you do the same if your office has opening and closing hours.

Schedule
Let me take this moment to reiterate a very important point that I doubt can ever be overemphasized. **To be successful in the transportation industry you have to maintain a flexible and fluid schedule – both you and your drivers.** I'll probably be saying this again before I'm through, so don't be surprised!

Plans are always subject to change in the transportation industry. Therefore, it's not uncommon for a driver's shift schedule to change as well. But, you, the dispatcher/company have to maintain 100% control of your driver's schedules.

Does this mean that you don't want to be as accommodating as possible to your drivers? Of course not, do everything you can to accommodate the needs of your drivers.

However, you first have to ensure that the needs of your company are met. Your schedule has to be such that you accomplish your company's mission.

A driver that complains about getting up in the morning probably isn't a good choice for your company. Or, a driver that complains about starting his shift at different times each day might pose a problem. Further, a driver that doesn't understand that your shift doesn't end at the same time everyday could also be a problem.

As Joel says, “A professional stays until the job is done - regardless of the time of day.” And this type of understanding and demeanor is necessary for your drivers.

Will drivers get sick? Yes, and they will periodically have doctor appointments too. Periodically, a driver's car will breakdown on the way to work. And all other circumstances that plague every other employee regardless of industry will also happen to your business.

But, you can't allow drivers to dictate to you when they will and will not work unless you have predetermined arrangements established with certain drivers such as part-time employees. Drivers needing time off, for whatever reason, should notify the company well in advance in accordance with your company policies and procedures.
As a quick side note, I will refer you to Joel’s *How to Build a Million Dollar Medical Transportation Company* ecourse. In his ecourse Joel discusses many of our company policies and procedures. I encourage you to review them and then create similar policies for your company. I can assure you that it will definitely help with your management and control.

In our company, the high majority of our drivers are considered full-time. They work hourly during a standard work week and work for commission in the evening and weekend hours. However, we also have a small number of drivers that we consider to be part-time. Ironically enough, the two gentlemen that we consider part-time are retirees and they’re simply looking for enough work to keep them busy while making a little extra money.

Our part-time employees only work when we’re really busy or we’re short handed. When necessary, we also use our part-time drivers to perform distance transports. Not that our two retirees can’t adequately conduct local transports, but they are older gentlemen and we have no problem scheduling them for distance transports. We’ll keep our more efficient drivers working locally where we need to focus ensure efficiency.

Our two retirees, part-timers, we have the confidence to assign them a distance transport and send them on their way. They’re competent and capable and can “kind of” move at their natural pace without having to be “hurried” doing local transports.

Regardless of the circumstances, you, the dispatchers, set and maintain the schedules for your drivers to follow and comply with and not vice versa.

**Always Say “Please” and “Thank You”**

Yes, I’m here to tell you that you, the dispatcher, must be assertive. But that doesn’t mean that you can’t be polite in so doing!
Even though your drivers are being paid to work, they too are deserving of and will appreciate your respect. And I can tell you that the simple use of the words “Please” and “Thank You” will go along way with your drivers.

Consider the difference. Instead of telling your driver to “Go to 123 Main Street and pick up Mary Jane heading to 456 Riverside Drive, needs a chair” how about saying “Could you please go to 123 Main Street and pick up Mary Jane heading to 456 Riverside Drive, needs a chair?”

Just those few extra words make a big difference. They’re suggestive instead of being demanding. Instead of your drivers thinking that they’re being told what to do they feel more like they’re part of a team working to accomplish the mission of your team.

Similarly, when your drivers call complete with a transport, preface your response with “Thank You.” If you have another transport for them to head for just tell them “Thank You, can you please head for John Doe at 123 Holland Avenue? I will give you the details as you get closer.”

You might be thinking that this is a minute point probably not even worth mentioning. But I would beg to differ. It’s just one of those little things that go a long way in building and improving relations between you and your drivers.

And the more they respect you, the more your drivers will be willing to work for you — especially when times get really busy and you might be a little short handed. And it’s at just such times, the hectic periods of the day, that’s when you realize who your “good” drivers are and whom you can rely on.

The Clients

As much as you need to be willing to assist your clients, there will be times where you simply cannot meet their requests.
For example, as Joel says and I definitely ensure in our company, “we are NOT a moving company. We are a transportation service.” And yes, there’s a big difference.

Especially when a client is being discharged from a nursing center after a lengthy stay, the former resident many times will have a lot of personal belongings that he/she needs to take home. Unfortunately, many times the nursing home and the client anticipate and expect that our drivers will pick up all their belongings and return them home with the client.

Now although our drivers work to be as accommodating as possible, we make it very clear that our primary responsibility is to transport the client first and foremost. If there are items that the driver AND the client can carry and hold in one trip to the vehicle then we are more than happy to assist.

However, we are not a moving service and we do not make several trips back and forth from the room to the vehicle. If members of the nursing staff would like to help carry some of the clients belongs to the van that’s fine.

However, under such circumstances we also work to ensure that there is someone at the client’s destination whom can help our driver to unload their possessions. The last thing we want is for a driver to arrive at a destination and there is no one there to receive the client and/or stick our driver with a van full of personal items.

Cancellation Process

Another great example for which you will most likely need to be very assertive is when it comes to canceling reservations. And this is a very serious concern that you need to consider up front and already have a company policy and procedure for how you plan to handle such situations.

The problem is when clients make reservations, you send a driver to pick them up, and the client either cancels the transport when your driver arrives, or they don’t answer the door, or they simply refuse to go, for whatever reason.
For me personally, I really think that this is my greatest personal disturbance regarding this business. The reason why is because it amazes me so much how some people can set up a transport yet don’t even have the common courtesy to cancel in advance. As a result, we end up wasting money on time, labor, fuel, and more. It’s just an absolute waste for us and I seriously work to limit it from happening!

At least if the patient is a Private Pay client we will charge them for at least a one-way transport. But unfortunately, it’s tough to do it with Medicaid clients. Why – because they typically don’t have any money! You and I and all the other tax payers pay their way. But we’ll talk more about Medicaid clients in a few minutes.

Now please don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that you don’t work to meet the needs of your clients. To the contrary, there will be times that you do have to go above and beyond “the call of duty” to create lasting and loyal clients. And as Joel continuously says, “Don’t chase the money, chase customers. The money is always behind the customers.”

And this is true. When you take care of the needs of the customer you’ll never have to worry about making money. But conversely, everyone has their limits and you cannot allow you or your business to be treated like a door mat. If you do, it’s only a matter of time before you’re losing money.

As I mention in more detail later, we have a two strike policy for people that don’t cancel their transport in advance prior to us sending a driver to pick them up. The first time it happens the client gets a warning. If it happens again, the client is “written off!” We will refuse to transport that client again unless there are legitimate extenuating circumstances.

Our standard cancellation policy is 30 minutes. We tell everyone, as a minimum, to contact us at least 30 minutes prior to their schedule PICK UP time, not their appointment time, to let us know if they need to cancel their transport.
So, if a client’s appointment is at 2:00 PM, we will most likely be picking them up at 1:30 PM. Thus, if they plan to cancel their reservation, we ask that they contact us no later than 1:00 PM.

Now realistically, this 30 minute policy is a relative number. It’s not a big deal as long as I have not already dispatched a driver to pick up the transport. So if a client cancels with 15 minutes prior to their scheduled pickup and I haven’t yet dispatched a driver, I will politely remind the client that, for future reference, to contact us at least 30 minutes prior to their scheduled pickup, but I won’t “lose any sleep over it” – as long as I haven’t yet dispatcher a driver for the call..

If you’re just starting your business, you might be thinking that this particular point, trip cancellation policies, is not that big of a deal. However, if you’re already in business and you’ve experienced such inconveniences I’m sure you can relate to my frustrations. It’s simply too much of a waste of time, money, effort, and labor to dispatch a driver to a location only to realize the client isn’t going – especially when you’re busy.

And when I say that we will “cut off” clients, I’m serious. We warn people and if it happens again we will contact Medicaid and let them know that we can no longer transport the client.

On a very few occasions we have relented when the DSS staff has begged us not to cut off a particular client. And as long as Medicaid gets involved and finds a way to ensure that the client doesn’t “burn us” again, we might consider keeping the client. If the problem continues, there’s no question we will no longer transport the client.
Accept Being a Good Salesperson

As I mentioned previously, as the dispatcher, you’re realistically the “gatekeeper” for your business. Why – because you’re literally the initial point of contact for your company. When people call to inquire about your service they talk to you. When people call to set up transports, they talk to you. If someone wants to call and complain, again, they talk to you first. So in short, as a dispatcher, you’re automatically in a sales position!

My obvious suggestion is to always be polite and project a positive attitude, even when you’re flustered or rushed for time. Now I’m sure my advice is much easier said than done. But you realistically have to find a way to do it – and you will.

Think about the scenarios if you haven’t experienced them already. The phone is ringing one minute from someone setting up a transport. Within the same minute another call comes in that you have to put on hold while you return to answer the first call. A short time later, another call comes in from someone asking for transportation prices followed by a call from a doctor office indicating a patient is ready to be returned. No sooner do you hang up and you’re receiving another call to set a transport, and on, and on, and on.

In my very short yet very realistic scenario, hopefully you can see that you can get very busy while dispatching. Literally, within a short few minutes you can talk to a half dozen people or more! But, you still need to be a positive and effective salesperson. You need to be able to accurately articulate your prices, explain your services, and more to inquiring clients.

Handling Inquiries

Many times, people don’t know about a non-emergency transportation company until they actually need assisted transportation. So it’s not uncommon for you to receive
many calls a day from people trying to get general information about your business; how it works, will you provide a wheelchair, how much does it cost and much more.

**When you receive inquiries, it’s a great opportunity to be enthusiastic about your service.** Let the potential client know that you’ll be there early, that your drivers will assist with the loading and unloading of the client, that you’ll be there for the return trip, and anything else that you feel is important about their possible experience with your service.

One thing that I want to caution you on though, is not to disclose any company information that is not appropriate. People are on a “need to know basis!”

For example, if someone asks personal information about employees and members of your company, that is obviously information that you should not share. I can’t tell you how many people call on a daily basis and ask for Joel. When he’s not in the office, many will ask for his cell phone number. I simply have to tell people that I am not authorized to give out that information.

Similarly, telemarketers will periodically solicit us. And especially when I’m busy, there’s no way that I want to entertain a telemarketer. I simply tell them that they’re contacting a business number and not to contact us again.

In the past we’ve even had collection agencies or divorce attorneys seeking personal information about some of our employees. Again, there is no way that I would share such information and I suggest that you do the same! It’s just not right giving out personal information regarding any of your employees, owners, or sensitive company information.

When it comes to inquiries, it’s a great opportunity to sell your business. When it’s a legitimate potential customer, **listen and ask questions. It let’s the prospect know that you care and that you know “your business.”** But if you determine the inquiry is someone looking for something other than transportation, I strongly recommend you to keep you lips sealed. There are simply too many threats; identity theft, lawsuits, and much more.
Quick Tips

So what are some simple strategies that you can use to be an effective salesperson?

First, know your business! Know your rates, know your capabilities in terms of personnel, vehicles, and equipment, and know locations. Knowing locations and the general length of time appointments take for specific doctor offices will help you in answering questions when people call to set up appointments. When people call, you’ll be able to rattle off necessary information without delay and it will project an alert and knowledgeable attitude.

In terms of scheduling, we generally schedule pickup times 30 minutes prior to the actual time of appointment. So, if a client has a 2:00 PM appointment, we expect to have our driver walking onto the floor of the facility or arriving at the client’s house by 1:30 PM.

But, if the client lives in a more rural area and/or the appointment location is more remote this pickup time will be pushed back even earlier. Again, this comes down to knowing your locations and general travel times.

Another strategy that I believe works very well and I quickly touched upon previously is to simply be a good listener! Especially for this particular industry, an industry in which the majority of your clients are elderly, being a good listener is a must.

I can’t tell you how much the majority of our clients love us and refuse to ride with anyone else. And what I’ve discovered over the years is that I’ve simply become a good listener when they call. Sure, I interject appropriate conversation as necessary. I enjoy talking with them. But seriously, I’ve discovered over the years that just by being an attentive listener really instills friendship, understanding, and compassion with our clients!

Some of you might be asking what this has to do with being a dispatcher. Or, how and when do you have to time to do so. Can you sit on the phone for a lengthy period of time with each client? No, of course not, especially if you’re the only dispatcher. But
when you don’t have other phone lines ringing and/or you do have multiple dispatchers, I encourage you to take the time to interact, exchange simple pleasantries with your clients, and let them expand on why they need transportation, their illness, their injury, or anything. If you have to put them on hold to answer another phone line, then do so.

And if you haven’t experienced such conversations as of yet, trust me, you will. You will have some of the cutest elderly people contacting you to make a reservation and the next thing you know they’ll be telling everything. ONLY if you have the time, I encourage you to practice a little “extra” patience and be a good listener. They’ll enjoy it, love you, and you’ll have taken another great step in securing a long-term client. And you’ll even feel good about yourself!

Never Saying “No”

Do your best to “close the deal” by never saying “No.” We already discussed this strategy, but it is very much worth reiterating. When you receive a call requesting transportation but you appear booked, do not outright say “No.” Rather, propose a more convenient time – even if it’s an hour or so later.

You will be absolutely amazed at how often hospitals will rearrange their discharge times around your schedule just to ensure that you’ll be there on time to transport the patient. Similarly, you’ll be amazed at how accommodating and understanding the average clients will be because you’re trying to “work with them” instead of simply saying “No.” They’ll appreciate your efforts.

So be smart and always think solutions instead of problems. Never outright say “No.” Rather, work to be accommodating and provide a solution.
It doesn’t matter what your business or your industry is, if you want to be successful you have to understand your clients. You have to know who your clients are, what their needs are, and how you can best meet their needs. If you fail to adequately meet their needs your business is sure to suffer.

Their Mentality

Not all clients are the same. And I mean this not only because of physical and mental conditions or limitation. But I’m also referring to differences in mentality. Let me expand on this thought by giving you two examples.

The first is what we call in our business the “Medicaid Mentality.” What’s the Medicaid Mentality? Well, let me preface this by saying that I know that it’s not politically correct to categorize people and mentalities in such a manner. But ultimately, it is what it is!

As Joel says, the Medicaid Mentality is the disposition and attitude that many people on Medicaid and Social Services tend to have. It’s the whole expectancy of entitlement mentality. People become so engrained and entrenched in having everything paid by the tax payers that they actually begin to think that they’re entitled to more and more and that you’re there exclusively to serve them.

Again, I know that this is not politically correct to be saying. But it needs to be said and, no, I’m not being disingenuous. I’m being totally serious and accurate. Why – because statistically speaking, at least as it is for our business, it’s the Medicaid clients that will give you the greatest amount of headaches.

Yes, its guaranteed money and you definitely want Medicaid clientele when you can get it. But I could literally write novels giving you examples upon examples of instances where we are running a minute or two late and the Medicaid client is already on the
phone cussing us out because we’re late. All the while, the driver is literally down the street or about to be knocking on their door.

On the flip side, I can’t tell you how many Medicaid clients we have “cut off” over the years. The primary reason why we have refused to transport certain Medicaid clients is because they fail to call us in advance for cancellations.

We’ve already talked about this, but Medicaid clients are infamous for not calling. You’ll send a driver, they’ll arrive, and the client just won’t go. Many times they won’t even open the door! The reason – because they’re not paying for it! All they have to do is call and reschedule their appointment through Social Services or the Broker Service responsible for confirming their transportation arrangements – but they just won’t do it because they simply don’t care; it’s no cost to them!

Again, we have the two strike rule. If we show up and they fail to go, for whatever reason, they are given a warning. The second time it happens they are cut off. We notify Social Services and let them know that we can no longer take this particular client.

Some of you might be thinking that this is a harsh tactic. But honestly, we’re simply too busy not too! These clients have everything paid for by you and me, the taxpayers, and they certainly have no comprehension or consideration for what it costs us in labor, fuel, and logistics to send a driver to their home only to discover that it was an absolute waste.

Another reason why we periodically have to cut off certain Medicaid clients is because they have been excessively rude or disrespectful to members of our staff. Sure, everyone has a bad day and gets frustrated at times. But clients that call our office and berate our staff, for whatever reason, or are simply rude and disrespectful, they too get cut off. And this isn’t exclusive to our office staff. We have had to refuse transportation to a handful of clients that failed to treat our drivers with the appropriate respect.

Conversely, it is usually the Private Pay clients that are the most understanding, accommodating, and polite on the phone and to drivers – even if you’re running a little behind schedule! Yet, it’s these clients, the ones that are paying out of pocket for quality
service, the ones that literally deserve to be upset if you’re late, that rarely complain or gripe!

Further, if a Private Pay client decides to cancel their appointment, they’re typically very responsible in calling in advance and canceling or rescheduling their transport. The reason, because they know it’s the right thing to do and that we’ll charge them for at least a one-way transport if one of our drivers shows up and they fail to go, regardless of the reason.

Overall, and generally speaking, your Medicaid clients as a whole will be the group of clientele that will test your patience and force you to become an effective problem solver! Will it be all of them? No. But if you had to classify your clientele you’ll see that your Medicaid clientele will cause you to solve a lot of problems. But you do it because it’s guaranteed money!

Now don’t get overly concerned that life is going to be miserable as a dispatcher. I know my little bit of “doom and gloom” sounds bad. But as they say, it’s just the “few bad apples that ruin it for everyone.” And that is definitely the case here.

The very high majority of your transports will be fine and you’ll meet and befriend many new people. The clients will be happy, your drivers will be happy, and you’ll be happy because you’re helping people and making money.

I just want you to understand the big picture. In every business, regardless of industry, there are always ups and downs or some kind of adverse elements. And I want you to be aware of some of these problems and/or mentalities as you enter this business and learn your position so that you can better respond and react.

**Send the Right Solution**

This next strategy comes from learning this business, the people you transport, and from effective communication with your drivers. It’s knowing how best to meet the specific needs of your individual clients.
As I mentioned, no two clients are the same. Everyone is different. You’ll learn that many clients have physical conditions, others have mental conditions, and some have both. And you’ll be absolutely amazed by some clients. You’ll meet very old people that are sharp as a tack.

We’ve transported clients that are over 100 years old and, mentally, they are as sharp as ever! Conversely, we’ve transported some people whom are very young that suffer from dementia, depression, or a host of other conditions.

So clearly, how you work with and handle each client is going to be different. And here is where personal concerns and attention comes in. You need to know which driver and which equipment to send to properly and safely care for and transport the patient.

All clients are different - and so are your drivers. Once you begin getting a firm grasp of dispatching you’ll begin to see the many differences between drivers. This is absolutely going to happen. This doesn’t necessarily mean that some drivers are better than others. But you’ll see that some drivers are more efficient than other, some are more resourceful than others, and some just have that little extra personality that customers just love.

So, knowing which driver to send to transport a client is also a part of “Sending the Right Solution!”

In our business, we are very fortunate to have a great crew of drivers. But this hasn’t always been the case. We have had our share of “problem” drivers that either quit or we have terminated for a variety of reasons.

But you’ll see which drivers stand out because clients, when scheduling transports, will ask for them. Also, when we send out invoices we include a simple questionnaire that customers can return with their payments. Many times these clients will make additional comments complimenting specific drivers. So this information will help illustrate which drivers stand out, which ones go “above and beyond the call of duty,” and which ones you can rely on to always perform well.
So going back to my point, as you more astutely understand the needs of individual clients and you understand the capabilities of your individual drivers, you’ll be able to better match clients with drivers. And let me give you an example of why this can be important.

Our one driver, Jeff, is a very, very nice man. He always arrives to work on time, is always prepared, always willing to help and contribute, and always goes the “extra mile” to make our clients comfortable. But the one thing we know about Jeff is that he’s definitely NOT a talker! And this isn’t a bad thing. It’s just his personality. So taking Jeff’s personality into consideration, we typically don’t send him on long-distance trips. The reason, he’d probably bore them to death! That doesn’t mean that he’d do a bad job of driving. It’s just that he’s not a conversationalist and might hurt the client with boredom!

But here’s what we also know about Jeff. He is incredibly efficient and detailed oriented. So, I would much rather have Jeff stay “local” and perform more transports locally. Why – because he’s efficient, reliable, and once he starts he’s like the Energizer Bunny and just keeps moving. So for a distance trip, I would send one of our other drivers.

For example, we have to elderly gentlemen, both of whom, ironically enough, are retired from IBM. They’re married, have pensions, and enjoy staying busy earning a little extra money. And because these two drivers, Jim and Carl, I typically try and send them on long-distance trips. The reason – because unlike Jeff, they’re great conversationalist! They’re your stereotypical elderly gentlemen that love to talk and chit chat about anything and tend to move at “their own pace.” So, on a lengthy trip, they are perfect for staying engaged with the clients.

And this is definitely not a knock on Jim or Carl, but they are definitely not as efficient as Jeff and some of our other drivers. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. It just is what it is. Jim and Carl are very competent and capable drivers but I know which patients and which transports to send them for.
Another very important factor to consider is beyond conversation. It’s just physical limitations and abilities. As I’m sure you know we have many, many overweight people in this country. So it stands to reason that you’re going to be transporting many heavy and overweight people just like we do. And no, I’m not saying this to be mean. This is just reality.

So I typically try to avoid sending Carl or Jim to transport an overweight person. I will send them for the assist, to help the primary driver to load and unload the patient, but I typically try to avoid sending these two smaller, elderly gentlemen to transport overweight patients.
Alright, it’s time to get down to the “nitty-gritty.” It’s time to start talking about the actual dispatching and logistics. So let me get this one important message out there right now - Get Dispatching Made Easy! It’s just too simple, too easy, and too helpful not to. And, it’s very, very cost effective. So if you don’t have it as of yet, go to www.dispatchingmadeeasy.com and get it!

I could sit here and write novels about how to dispatch manually. When I first started working for Joel, that’s what we were doing. And Joel explains this method in his How to Build a Million Dollar Medical Transportation Company ecourse. But once he created Dispatching Made Easy our lives got a whole heck of lot easier! Seriously, Dispatching Made Easy is the easiest and most industry specific dispatching system on the market.

At one point in time, Joel invested I believe around $9,000 on a dispatching system that proved to be a nightmare for us. Another dispatcher and I spent hours and hours on the phone with computer programmers from this one company trying to get this dispatching system to work. But it was just too much work, too much effort, and there were simply too many bells and whistles that were useless to this industry that were a waste. It was simply too much and too confusing. So now this expensive software sits in one of Joel’s desk drawers and serves as a “dust collector” as he calls it.

So again, let’s not waste time. Just get DME!

But let me discuss some of the many reasons why you need Dispatching Made Easy and how it’s going to improve your dispatching.

1. Its going to save you time! Using a manual dispatching system will require a great deal of handwriting – trust me, I know from prior experience! And, doing so much handwriting is a lot more difficult and frustrated when the phone lines are ringing and you’re trying to send drivers for calls.
2. You’re going to be organized. And this is a very big and important reason to use a computerized dispatching system. You don’t have papers lying around everywhere! Further, all of your data is consolidated onto a single computer screen. You’re not moving trip ticks around on a cork board and you don’t have to mark, file, and store dated trip ticks.

3. You can track statistics on your drivers, vehicles, and for your clients. This alone, in my opinion, makes DME worth its weight in gold. Tracking how many transports your individual drivers perform on a daily, weekly, monthly basis and beyond is very important in identifying which drivers are making you money and which ones might possibly be costing you money! We actually consider these statistics when reviewing driver’s records for Employee of the Month.

4. You can track statistic on your vehicles. This information creates a profile of how frequently individual vehicles are being use. So, based upon how frequently you’re using a specific vehicle you can compare it to the fuel usage and maintenance cost. If you’re fuel cost are excessive, you either have a maintenance problem or a driver might be stealing gas from you. Similarly, if a vehicle is not being used excessively yet it is costing you a lot in maintenance, then clearly you have to consider that this vehicle is costing you money rather than making you money.

5. Track statistics for individual clients. This is another great opportunity to review how often you’re transporting particular clients, which driver transported them, and even what vehicles you’re using for the transports.

6. Maintain an unlimited amount of data on every client and every transport. Again, this is another very important feature. Why – because for each and every transport you can document what times calls were received, who called, who set up each transport, who authorized payment of transport, billing information, any possible details that are pertinent to your transport. If there is a problem, regardless of how minor, document it! Document the who, what when, where and why. As Joel says, “when in doubt, document!”
7. Dispatching Made Easy allows you to visually see your transports for each day on your computer screen. And because its color coded, it gives you a much better visual and allows you to click and drag new trips and completed trips. And because you’re no longer using a manual method, your hands are free to type as you receive calls for transports. While listening to the person on the other end of the phone you’re busy typing necessary trip data.

8. Another important feature is printing Daily Trip Schedules. These Schedules are important because you can give them to your drivers for easy reference. It allows you to enter in all necessary data for each transport.

So, you’re evening drivers can use these Schedules to see what transports are still “in play” during their shift. You can give them to your drivers so they can refer to them for early morning transports that need to be completed before your office is opened. Also, drivers can use them during the day so as to reduce the amount of time you need to stay on the two-way with them.

For example, if you’re busy on the phone and you need to dispatch a driver, all you have to do is tell your driver “Please go pick up Mrs. Smith.” The driver can then refer to the Daily Trip Schedule and all of the necessary transportation information is there for his/her review.

Just remember, the Daily Trip Schedule does NOT take the place of a dispatcher! Don’t just give drivers Daily Trip Schedule and tell them to go complete all their trips. To the contrary, as previously discussed, you maintain 100% of the control of direction and dispatch – bottom line!

We’ll be talking more about how to incorporate DME into your dispatching operation, but first, let me mention another piece of software that I recommend using. It’s Quickbooks. If you’re not familiar with Quickbooks, it’s the accounting and invoicing software that I recommend everyone use.
First, it’s very easy to learn and operate. Next, it’s really very, very good and well organized. And thirdly, it’s cheap. You can pick it up at Staples or Office Max for probably just over $100.

People have asked why DME does not allow you to create and print invoices. And the reason for that is two fold. First, why reinvent the wheel if you don’t have to. When I’m dispatching, I will keep DME and Quickbooks on the same computer and just scroll back and forth. I’m continuously creating invoices throughout the course of the day.

Secondly, Joel’s goal in creating DME was to put quality dispatching software in your hands for less than $500. And he’s accomplished that. But if he did invest the time and money necessary to reinvent the wheel and make it so that DME could create invoices and manage your accounts receivables DME would be costing clients several thousands of dollars versus a few hundred.

So instead of getting great dispatching software at a very cost effective price you would be investing in software that is like the “dust collector” sitting in Joel’s desk. So yes, there is a good reason why you can’t create invoices in DME.

**Your Dispatching Arrangement**

First and foremost, get organized! Keep your work area neat, clean, and clear. Being unorganized leads to confusion and, in my opinion, leads to visual stress. Regardless of who is dispatching in our office, I ensure that they keep our work area clean.

Joel mentions that technically, you can create and operate your business in the space the size of a closet or small office. And this is true because everything focuses on and around your dispatch. So as long as you have an office that allows you phone lines, a fax line, computer hookups, and an internet connection you can be in business.

We have three phone lines in our office, all that roll into one another. So if a call comes in while another is already in progress one of the other available lines will ring. Obviously, our phones are right next to our computers. Similarly, our fax is hooked up
on the other side. This arrangement is simply out of convenience and to encourage efficiency. Many times we will be on the phone while someone is trying to send us a fax. With the phone and fax so close to our seat we can confirm with the person on the phone that we are indeed receiving their fax.

In terms of phones, we have a total of five phones in our offices. Do you need this many? Absolutely not! We just have a large office space and multiple people working in our office.

In regards to headsets, we do use them. We got ours at Staples. Do we use them all the time? No, not really. It’s really up to you and your preference and what works best for you. I use the headsets sporadically where as Trish, another one of our dispatchers, uses the headset continuously. The only time she takes it off is if she’s leaving her desk area.

In regards to the internet, the reason why you should have internet access is so that you can access mapquest. We use mapquest almost daily to get mileage for quoting a client on the cost of a specific transport. Also, we will print direction for drivers heading out of town. There are other sites that can provide such information, but we’re used to using mapquest and this site tends to be very accurate and reliable.

Another reason why you might need to have the internet is because more and more counties and areas are allowing you to bill Medicaid and/or Brokers online. Where once upon a time we used to have to fill out large documents to get reimbursed we can now expedite the process by visiting the state sponsored website or the broker’s website and enter in the necessary trip information.

If your area provides such a billing convenience, I strongly encourage you to learn the system and use it. It saves us a lot of effort and time and I’m sure it will for you too. Also, we get paid probably twice as fast which is obviously a big motivation for using their online system.

Again, there are significant variations across the country in terms of billing. Here in Broome County, New York, we bill our local Department of Social Services monthly with
a single invoice that lists all the transports for the last month. In turn, we receive a large sum check from DSS once a month. However, for the surrounding counties for whom we provide transportation services we use the state sponsored website, www.emedny.org. Once the information is entered and accepted we typically get payment in about 3 weeks.

If you’re in an area that uses a Broker versus working directly with the Department of Social Services, check with the Broker to learn of their billing processes and procedures. It’s very possible that your Broker might be using an online system similar to that of what we use here in New York.

Knowing Your Community

What I mean about knowing your community is that you’re familiar with many facilities and locations that you’re drivers are going to be frequenting often. But more so, knowing your community includes knowing the particulars of each location. How long does it take to get to each facility? Typically, how long are the appointments at each facility? What are the entrance and exit policies and procedures for each facility?

You’ll find that there are many “hot spots” and frequent patterns that develop with transports. Obviously, people will be going to hospitals for doctor appointments. But there will also be many independent doctor offices or complexes that you’ll frequent often. And over time you’ll be able to estimate how long each appointment last.

For example, one “hot spot” for us is radiation treatment. We know that these appointments literally last five minutes. So we rarely even pull the driver and send him for another transport. We typically let the driver stay and wait to expedite the patient’s quick return.

Another example is a particular psychologist’s office that we frequent often. Many of his clients are Medicaid recipients and for some reason the high majority of his patients come from one particular assisted living center. Regardless of the reason, we know that each appointment lasts 30 minutes. Thus, when we drop off a patient to this doctor’s
office we can roughly estimate when that patient will come “back into play” (a transport that needs to be returned).

So knowing the duration of many doctor appointments coupled with the driving time really helps in planning your logistics. You can better assign drivers to specific transports and arrange your daily schedule.

Some more very important information that you’ll want to know is how do you enter and exit each facility and are there any particular requirements for frequenting each facility.

At most nursing facilities and hospitals in our community medi-van drivers can’t just pull up and load and unload patients at the front door. Doing so would create a bit of a traffic jam. Therefore, most of these locations have a separate or alternate entrance for us to load and unload. So I’m guessing that similar entrance and exit arrangements might also exist at the facilities you frequent as well.

Other important considerations are the particular requirements for each facility. For example, many senior centers require driver to sign-in and out. Others require drivers to be “buzzed in.” Two of our area hospitals require drivers to report to the Support Services Office to pick up an approval fax prior to discharging a patient. Obviously, all of these requirements are unique, but they all take time that you have to consider when planning your transports.

Learning the details of your community like we just discussed takes time and experience. But you can expedite your learning curve by doing what we have done several times when we have hired a new dispatcher.

For one week, or five full business days, we actually send our new dispatcher to ride along with our drivers! This is a very big help in educating our dispatchers. They learn the community and the “hot spots.” They talk and meet with customers and interact with different drivers building company friendships and improving communications. They see the vehicle and equipment from the inside and gain insight into how long each transport takes.
If your business has multiple dispatchers or when you grow to such a size, I strongly encourage you to send dispatchers-in-training to ride along with your drivers even if it’s only for a few days. We’ve notice that it significantly expedites their learning curve in terms of dispatching and about our business in general.

Dispatching Vehicles

Despite what some might think, dispatching vehicles is MUCH more than randomly sending available drivers for transports! Believe it or not, there is a degree of sensible strategy and forethought that goes into dispatching vehicles and managing a fluid schedule.

One of the biggest and most common mistakes that a novice dispatcher will make is to send any available driver to respond to the next call that comes in. In theory, such a practice works. But logistically, it can be disastrous! When you only have one or two vehicles, sure, then you have no alternative. But let me be clear on this point, when you have a fleet of vehicles, you can’t just send the next available vehicle to respond to the next call.

Here’s the situation. Step back and look at your entire region, the region that you predominately service on a daily basis, and evaluate how big it is. Even if you’re in a small market, step back and look at the size of your region.

From corner to corner, side to side, if you had an available driver in one corner of your immediate region and a pickup in the other far corner, what is the distance and travel time? If it’s considerable, which most likely it will be, the travel time has to be a serious consideration prior to sending any available driver.

Let me give you an example to illustrate a better understanding. We frequent a particular nursing facility that is somewhat remote, but we can still access it with relative ease because it’s not too far off a main highway. However, if a driver left this particular facility and traveled east to another facility that we frequent often the travel time is approximately 40 minutes. So let’s say that a driver just completes a call at one facility
and a patient needs transportation from the other facility. Needless to say, it’s safe to say that it would take 40 minutes to get to the new pick up.

Considering this 40 minute travel time, it might actually be far more suitable and practical to send another driver, one that is currently NOT complete, for the patient awaiting transport. The reason is because you might have another driver that is currently engaged in another transport but is physically closer to the awaiting patient.

So if the driver that is closer in distance can complete his current transport within a reasonable time frame it would actually be more sensible to send the closer driver. Even though a second driver is still engaged with a client when the return call comes in for another patient, it’s still very realistic that the second driver could beat the first available driver to the new location for the awaiting patient.

The other factor that a good dispatcher will consider besides just time is gas and wear and tear. For the first driver to travel 40 minutes unload without a patient is going to use gas unnecessarily. By waiting for the second driver to complete you save on gas and the wait time for the patient. It’s more sensible to send the second driver for the waiting patient and bring the first driver back into the immediate region to await further return trips.

So again, consider the big picture. Don’t just send any available driver for the next scheduled transport. Know your community, travel times, and general length of appointment times.

One thing that Joel did a while ago to better train one particular dispatcher that we were having just such a problem with is he went to Barnes and Noble and purchased a laminated map of Broome County. He then put arrow stickers all over the map labeling where all the hospitals, nursing facilities, and “hot spots” are that we frequent.

Joel put this map right in front of our primary phone on the wall so that this particular dispatcher could easily refer to and see the general distance between such points. Needless to say, it had a marvelous affect in making her consider the big picture in
terms of time and travel distance. This map significantly improved her dispatching strategies and overall abilities.

If you haven’t already done so, I would encourage you to duplicate Joel’s idea. Get a good and current map of your area, label your “hot spots,” and post it or have it readily available for your dispatchers.

**Know Your Capabilities**

As I discuss the need for you to astutely and accurately know your capabilities I am actually referring to multiple variables!

First, it’s very important to be well versed and familiar with the capabilities of all of your vehicles, your stretchers, wheelchairs, and all other types of equipment. And this is where I go back to my suggestion that your dispatchers do as we do in our business; spend at least a few days riding around with your drivers.

Sending our dispatchers-in-training out on the road really does prove to be a valuable tool in their training. In fact, when we hire a new dispatcher, we literally send them out on the road for five days PRIOR to giving them any office training!

Our dispatchers learn what the drivers are doing before they learn anything about dispatching. And ironically enough, besides learning about the vehicles, drivers, facilities, and community, the other benefit of sending our dispatchers out on the road first is it significantly increases their dispatching learning curve!

When a dispatcher-in-training returns from training with our drivers he/she picks up dispatching significantly faster than had we just trained them in the office! It’s because the dispatcher-in-training has, over the previous five days, picked up on the communication between our drivers and dispatcher. The dispatcher-in-training has learned how drivers receive instructions from dispatcher, how drivers, call “in route,” how they call “complete,” how they contact dispatch for questions and much more.
So if you can find a way to send your dispatcher out on the road with your drivers even for only a short few days, I can assure you that it will help your dispatchers learn the “big picture” of what your company’s capabilities are, what the demands are of your drivers, and much more.

Now, if you’re a smaller company with a single dispatcher and you think that such a strategy just isn’t feasible, let me share with you the following idea.

First, using Dispatching Made Easy, print out a copy of your Daily Trip Schedule. Next, forward your office phone line to a cell phone. Then, get in the van and ride around with one of your drivers while making notes on your Daily Trip Schedule while carrying it around on a clipboard!

If you’re currently a smaller business, this suggestion does work. I’ve shared this strategy with many of Joel’s clients and it has worked marvelously for them. But obviously, if you have fleet of 10, 20, or more vehicles where several calls are being received within a few minutes such a tactic probably wouldn’t be feasible. So needless to say, this is an idea that only you will know if it will work for you.

**Sending the Right Vehicle**

So now that you’re a well versed dispatcher, very familiar with your vehicles and equipment, you can now do one very important thing - send the right vehicle for the right transport!

I know, I know. This sounds offensively obvious. But I can tell you that I have personally witnessed new dispatchers make just such a mistake. And it’s much more than sending a vehicle that cannot accommodate the immediate needs of your patient. For example, we have many vehicles that are wheelchair and ambulatory accessible only. They do not accommodate stretchers. So obviously, sending one of these vehicles to pick up a stretcher bound patient would be a serious mistake! But don’t get me wrong, I’ve seen new dispatcher do this! And as I’m sure you can imagine, such a
simple mistake does screw up your logistics and inconveniences the patient because you have to wait to send another driver.

But again, sending the right vehicle is more than my previous simplistic example.

When drivers call “in route,” I strongly encourage you to train them to identify how many people are onboard with them. It’s very important because it literally lets you know your capabilities at that point.

For example, if you’re driver picks up a wheelchair patient and an aide accompanies the patient, I strongly recommend that you train your drivers to call “In route with patient and one aide onboard.”

We have found that this little bit of “extra” communication is very helpful because if we should have another stop for this driver to make on the way to the patient’s destination then we need to know if our driver literally has seating availability on board and if so, how much.

Further, it let's us know that whichever one of our drivers is responsible for returning this patient that the driver will actually be returning the patient and the aide. Under such circumstances, when we dispatch a driver for the return trip we will identify to the new driver that he will be transporting the patient AND an aide. This is just one more critical piece of information that further helps you to assess and evaluate your capabilities at all times.

**Sending the Right Driver**

Earlier, we were discussing the importance of understanding how and when to send the “right” driver for a specific transport. But in discussing the “right” driver you have to be concerned about two important factors.

First, efficiency! The driver you send has to be efficient in performing and completing each transport. If he/she is not efficient, you're not going to be making money. Rather, you're going to be losing money!
And the second concern is customer satisfaction. You want a driver that’s going to satisfy the needs of the clients so much so that the client will ride with you again and again.

Now, sending the “right” driver is NOT the same thing as sending a driver that has been specifically requested by a client. You’ll see that some of your best drivers will frequently be requested by customers. And if you can accommodate your customer’s requests that’s great!

But I will remind you of my example of sending one driver clear across town when you can wait a little longer and send another driver that completes in closer proximity.

On a daily basis we have clients that request specific drivers – drivers that they’re comfortable with or just prefer for whatever reason. And although we do our best to satisfy our client’s needs and requests, we cannot afford such requests to dictate how we manage and control our logistics.

We would never send a requested driver 40 minutes across town to satisfy a particular request when we already have a driver in the immediate vicinity and can more quickly respond to the call.

And to reiterate, sending the right driver includes knowing which drivers can best accomplish specific transports. There are some drivers that I would prefer to send on distance transports and others that I prefer to keep “in town.” The drivers that I try and keep “in town” are drivers that I know are very safe yet are fast and efficient.

You too will, over time, become familiar with each of your drivers and what they’re capable of performing. Once you’ve reached a comfortable level of understanding of each driver you will more astutely and accurately dispatch the “right” driver for each transport.
Knowing When to Send an Assist

When in doubt – send and assist! Regardless of the circumstances, if you even suspect that you’ll need an assist, or especially if a driver requests an assist, do whatever you have to do to send a second person to help safely complete the transport.

There are a few circumstances where you can predict that you’re going to need to send an assist. The first is if you’re transporting an oversized person. Under such circumstance, play it safe and send a second driver. The reason is two fold.

First, it helps protect the safety and welfare of the client. The last thing you want to do is put a driver in a situation where they risk dropping, banging, or simply losing control of a patient. And as you might suspect, because we’re in a VERY litigious society, under such circumstances you could possibly be exposing yourself to a lawsuit!

Secondly, sending an assist also helps to protect and preserve the safety and welfare of your driver! You definitely don’t want a client to suffer an accident. But you also don’t want one of your drivers to suffer an accident either! And an accident with a driver could involve something as generic as pulling out their back.

Needless to say, such an injury with one of your drivers could lead to your driver missing time from work and quite possibly involve opening a workers comp case. So, always practice safety and play it safe!

One thing that has helped us predict in advance if we need to plan on sending an assist for hospital discharges is a disclosure policy. Through much poking and prodding on our part, the hospitals that we contract with and service have finally made it hospital policy that any person over 260 lbs. must be identified when scheduling the transport. So when the hospital support services contacts us to schedule transportation they are required to let us know if the patient’s weight exceeds 260 lbs.

The reason why this policy took a while for us to implement is because of client confidentiality. We had to wait to cut through a lot of “red tape” in order to get this policy
active. But needless to say, we’re thankful because this advanced notice has proven to be a big help for us in terms of scheduling our logistics.

Too many times we arrive to transport a patient only to discover that the person is oversized and, thus, force us to move things around to ensure that the driver had an assist at the place of destination; an assist to help get the patient into their residence or nursing home.

Under such circumstances, our driver would discharge the patient, load them into the vehicle, and then, while traveling to the patient’s destination, we would have another driver in route to the same location to assist with unloading the patient. But now that the hospitals have recognized this problem and the inconvenience for them as well as for us, they have agreed to tell us in advance if the patient is over 260 lbs.

Now, because of this increased communication, there is no delay and really no inconvenience. There’s no need for us to scramble to make last minute changes to our schedule by having to send an assist. Now, we know in advance and can prepare accordingly.

Another occasion where we absolutely know in advance if we need to send an assist is when we are discharging a stretcher bound patient to a residence. We know that an assist is an absolute must because it takes two people to carry and maneuver the stretcher up the stairs and into the residence.

Despite how much or how little the patient weighs, if the patient is stretcher bound we absolutely have to send an assist. One driver takes one end of the stretcher and the other driver operates the other end of the stretcher to carry the stretcher up any stairs and over any thresholds.

Now, don’t misunderstand. You do not need two people to operate, load, and unload a stretcher bound patient if you’re transporting them to and from hospitals and nursing facilities. Most of these locations have sliding or powered doors and no thresholds or stairs to overcome. But the reason it’s important for me to make the distinction between
using one versus two people for a stretcher transport is because this is a very common question that Joel receives from clients.

If you’re like many others and you think that you need two people to perform a transport you’re absolutely wrong! If you don’t believe me I encourage you to get your hands on Joel’s Million Dollar Seminar DVD Series and you’ll see just the opposite! The only time we use two people for a transport is when a second driver is working as an assist.

There are also times when we do need to send an assist to help a driver perform a wheelchair bound patient if the patient is overweight. Typically, a single driver will be able to perform a wheelchair transport independently. But again, if we know that the person is oversized and/or if the driver arrives at the location and determines that a second pair of hands is needed then we absolutely play it safe and find a way to send a second driver. There might be a delay in waiting for the second driver to arrive, but it is better to wait, play it safe and send an assist and suffer a delay, rather than to suffer a lawsuit!

So again, when in doubt, play it safe and send an assist!

Know the Hot Spots

I reiterate this point because, in discussing logistics, timing is everything! You want to become familiar with the prime locations and travel times during peak and non-peak hours. This is important because when you know the “timing” you can determine if drivers are on schedule, if something has happened, if drivers are delayed, or if drivers or loafing and doing something other that what they should be doing!

Learning the “hot spots” should come quickly to you. It’s just a matter of seeing and analyzing the general flow of your daily traffic. But the key trick is learning the general length of time of transports and appointments. And being able to generally predict when a return transport will come “into play” comes with time and experience.
Remember Who You Are

Remember, KNOW YOUR MISSION! Know exactly what the purpose and mission is of your company.

If you’re a non-emergency medical transportation company you most likely won’t be transporting drunken college students down to the bars! So, don’t ever make the mistake of trying to be something that you’re not. Doing so could ruin your image, confuse your drivers, and even lead to other problems such as making you late for a regular customer.

As Joel always says, “Always make the main thing the main thing! Know where you get your money from and do everything to protect and preserve that source of income!”

Does this mean that you can’t diversify? Absolutely not! We’ve diversified over the years since I’ve been here and if you too have an opportunity to expand then I encourage you to do so.

If you haven’t done so already, I strongly encourage you to read Joel’s FREE ebook *A New Opportunity for Additional Revenue*. You’ll get this resource FREE when you invest in his ecourse.

In *A New Opportunity for Additional Revenue* you’ll learn how we use our drivers and vehicles to keep them moving during off peak hours to generate additional revenue. But in so doing, we always know what our “main thing” is and we do anything necessary to protect it. And, we would never allow any trips to deter us from adequately servicing our non-emergency transportation trips.

**Provide Courtesy Calls**

Another quick strategy that I encourage you to do is to provide courtesy calls as much as possible. Just like a doctor or dentist office, try and call your client’s the day prior or the
morning of their appointments just to remind them and to confirm that they’re still going. And honestly, this practice is even more for your benefit than it is for the client.

Periodically, you’ll call a client to remind them of their appointment only to discover that they are, for whatever reason, no longer going. And I can assure you, it’s far better to learn over the phone that a client isn’t going rather than sending a driver and then having to discover that they’re not going! As I mentioned previously, this is one of my biggest pet peeves!

Now let’s be realistic. Are you always going to be able to give everyone a courtesy call? No, probably not. But when you have a few spare moments, I would definitely invest the time and effort. Again, it’s a huge convenience to you and it also sends a great message to your new and existing clients. They’re happy that you didn’t forget about them and they’re impressed that you’re “on top” of everything.

Obviously, if you’re a single dispatcher, making courtesy calls throughout the course of the day can be a little bit more difficult than if you have multiple dispatchers in your office. Typically, we have no less than two people in our office at any one time. Thus, it’s much easier for us to provide courtesy calls. But regardless, any available time you have I strongly encourage you to do so. It really is a convenience and does pay dividends for the client, for you, and your drivers.

Managing Your Time Clock

In knowing your purpose, in knowing your mission, you have got to know and understand that everything you do must be based upon efficiency, efficiency, efficiency! And managing your time clock, your labor costs, are of paramount concern when it comes to being efficient.

You have to keep in mind that labor costs are associated with multiple variables beyond just the hourly rate that you pay your employees. Your workers compensation policy is based upon the number of dollars that you pay out in labor. Similarly, your unemployment insurance and the amount you pay in FICA are also based upon the
amount you pay in labor. Therefore, the more you pay in labor the greater the cost of workers compensation insurance and associated employment taxes.

Now if you’re an owner, does this mean that you should limit your number of employees or how much you pay your employees – no, not at all. But it does mean that if you want a healthy, prosperous, and profitable business you do have to be smart in how you schedule your employees so that your labor rate does not make you unprofitable!

I have to be honest with you. When I first started working for Joel I never considered such a “big picture.” I never considered the many dynamics of a business and how so many variables affected one another and affected profits.

But by starting with Joel’s accounts receivables, then accounts payables, and continuing to grow with his business in so many ways I have sincerely come to appreciate every aspect of his business and business in general. So on all level of business I firmly understand the importance of being efficient. And whether you as a dispatcher are an employee or an owner, being efficient in everything you do is an absolute must.

When it comes to scheduling your drivers, let me first tell you that in this industry, you absolutely have to hire drivers on an hourly basis. Again, when I first started working for Joel such a consideration was irrelevant to me. I couldn’t have told you why you have to pay hourly versus salary. But ironically enough, this is one of the single most common questions that Joel receives from his clients around the country – “Should I pay my employees hourly or salary?”

The reason why your drivers should always be hourly employees is because you have to remember that the transportation industry is a very fluid situation. Things can change very quickly and there are many factors that can affect your level of business on a daily basis.

For example, bad weather, time of day, time of year, holidays, accidents, and more can affect your overall daily volume of business. You can start out with a high volume of business at the beginning of the day but if a snow storm comes in you might find yourself with a considerable number of cancellations!
Under such circumstances, where your volume of daily business declines for whatever reason, you need to be able to reduce your labor costs. If business is slowed you can’t pay excessive amounts in labor. Rather, if you find yourself with a “slow” day, a day that is not quite as busy as others, you need to be smart in how you schedule your drivers.

You and/or the owner of your company can’t be paying for drivers to sit around not working. If there is slow day or a decline in business throughout the course of a business day you need to be able to “let drivers go” for the day. In short, if there’s no work, you can’t keep drivers on the clock. It’s just not profitable!

However, if your business is anything like ours, a decline in business throughout the course of a day will be very rare. Again, typically, the only time we finish with less in total transports than we started with at the beginning of a day is when bad weather forces people to cancel their trips.

But on most days, we average between anywhere from a 10-20% increase in total volume of transports! These additional transports come in from hospital discharges, emergency room discharges, or simply from clients making last minute reservations.

So there are two scenarios you need to plan for when it comes to scheduling drivers and managing your time clock. The first, if there is a slowing of business, for whatever reason, you need to be able to take drivers off the clock so as to limit your labor costs. If there is no money coming in you have to limit the money going out!

Secondly, and hopefully more times than not, your total volume of business will increase throughout the course of the day. You’ll finish with more transports than you started. Under just such circumstances you have to make sure that you actually have the available labor to cover the increase in business!
Evening Scheduling

Technically there is a third scenario for which you need to invest serious strategic thought into your schedule. It's your evening and weekend drivers.

If you're business is like ours, and you don't keep your physical office open 24 hours, you'll need drivers that serve on an “on-call basis.” Our drivers work a rotation where they periodically serve one evening during the week every other week and one weekend a month.

The reason that I don't include this third scenario with the previous two scenarios is because drivers are not paid an hourly rate for “after hours” work. Rather, they receive a percentage commission of each transport they perform. But we'll talk more about this in a moment.

So what do these scheduling scenarios mean to you as a company? It means that you need to hire flexible people/drivers! I said it before and I can't stress this to you enough, the transportation industry by its very nature is a fluid situation and thus, it demands a flexible schedule. And without exaggeration, your drivers need to maintain a flexible attitude.

Unlike the typical 9-5 job, as a driver in the transportation industry you might start one day at 8:00 AM, the next at 7:00 AM, and the next 9:00 AM. Similarly, you might finish one day 5:00 PM, the next at 4:00 PM, and the next at 6:00 PM. It really all depends on your transports and the scheduling.

Taking these scenarios into consideration, how you literally schedule your drivers is really up to you. But let me share with you two quick thoughts that we use when considering out scheduling.

First, we try and keep our efficient drivers “in town.” This doesn’t mean that any one particular driver is not capable of performing any of our transports. But as I mentioned earlier, you too will get a “feel” for your individual drivers and their capabilities. And realistically, some will move faster than others and some are more capable and
resourceful than others. It’s just common sense. So because the bulk of our transports are local, in town transports, we always work to keep our more efficient drives “in town.”

Secondly, I won’t call them slow, because that would be disrespectful and inaccurate. But, what I will say is that we do have some drivers that move at a more moderate pace. It’s not that they’re not capable. Rather, they just move at a different pace than others. But with these drivers, we try and schedule our distance trips and out-of-town transports. It’s just common sense. We keep our “fast” guys local and our more moderate drivers on the road where they don’t have to operate under such strict demands.

Evening / After-Hours Operation

A considerable portion of your business will be contingent upon doctor offices. You’ll be transporting patients from hospitals and nursing homes to various doctor appointments and, thus, when doctor offices are closed you’ll definitely see a decline in your volume of business. Therefore, on the evenings, weekends, and around holidays you’ll not need as many drivers on duty.

After hours, the majority of your business will most likely be comprised of dialysis patients traveling for blood work to and from the hospital, emergency room discharges, or other pre-scheduled transports. So, I strongly encourage you to develop strategies that will allow your business to serve your community around the clock. Making your business available 24 hours a day seven days a week offers many advantages.

First, chances are very good that some of your competition won’t be open 24/7. So this automatically provides an opportunity for you – especially if you’re just starting your business and you’re trying to penetrate your local market. Most of our competitors are not open 24/7 because, ironically enough, we took eventually took control of most of the evening business several years ago. Before, our local emergency rooms would call whoever was available. But by developing a good reputation we have become the provider of choice!
Another reason why you should consider being a 24/7 business is because it’s an excellent marketing tool. Advertising as a 24-hour service gives you a higher degree of credibility.

If your brochures, company literature, and word-of-mouth advertising expresses that you’re 24/7 it will reinforce to your customers that you’re committed to their needs around the clock. Nurses, administrators, family members, and the customers will greatly appreciate your 24/7 commitment.

The next obvious reason to stay in operation around the clock is because it’s an opportunity to increase revenue! Where some business owners may think that such a strategy will not be profitable, if you pay your drivers on a per-call basis, you can make money!

In other words, as I mentioned previously, during “after hours” your drivers are not on the clock. Rather, they earn commission for each trip that they perform. If your driver performs a transport, they’ll make a percentage of that specific call and you’ll make the rest. It’s a win / win situation!

Deciding on the percentage that you’ll pay each driver is up to you and your market. You just need to make sure that you pay your employees an honest and reasonable wage and that it’s in compliance with all applicable labor laws. But more importantly, you want to give your evening drivers a reasonable enough commission that will give them the incentive necessary to get up and answer an after-hours call.

You can’t predict when a request for transport will come from an emergency room. It can come at 10:00 pm, 3:00 am, or any time in between. You want motivated drivers that know that they have to get up and answer each call. Every time the phone rings with a request for transport, your driver(s) should be thinking about putting money in their pocket. So, be generous, don’t be cheap, but don’t lose money either!
Managing Your After-Hours Business

So, how do you actually dispatch and manage your business after hours? Obviously, you don’t want to lose money by increasing your overhead expenses by keeping your office open 24/7 unless you really do have enough business to make it worth your while!

As I’m sure you’ve already learned from Joel’s *How to Build a Million Dollar Medical Transportation Company* ecourse, we forward our office phone lines directly to an evening manager. Typically, we have three drivers serving “on-call” each evening. There is the primary driver who is also the manager, a secondary driver, and a third driver that will respond if needed. If a driver is not needed, he/she does as they wish.

The evening manager is responsible for answering and coordinating each call. Around 5:00 pm, as the office is preparing to close, we forward our main phone line to his/her company cell phone. Once forwarded, every time someone calls our office line it rings directly to our evening manager’s cell phone.

Other than saving money by not having your literal office open 24/7, one of the best things about having the phone forwarded directly to an evening manager is your increased response time. When your manager receives a request for transport, he/she can literally tell the person requesting transportation his/her exact location and how long it will take him/her to arrive for the pick-up.

We structure our first, second and third drivers, so that should our primary driver be unable to perform a transport because they’re already involved, he/she can call to the second or third driver.

But because our primary driver also serves as the evening manager answering the phones, they are responsible for writing down the necessary information so as to properly dispatch another driver to cover that specific call. Your manager will need to know the name of the patient, where to pick-up and drop off the patient, the time, and the responsible billing party.
Dispatching for Dollars with Kathryn J. Thayer

So, how will your evening manager document the necessary information of an after-hours call? Well, this is where your Dispatching Made Easy Daily Time Schedule will come in handy!

Your evening manager can just write on the Daily Time Schedule and then submit it to your office in the morning for processing. Also, you’ll want to use your Daily Time Schedule because periodically you’ll receive calls from clients making changes for the following day. This is VERY important information that your evening manager needs to document for the day-time dispatcher to see, account, and plan for!

The last thing you want is to miss a transport during the day because of your evening driver’s failure to properly document an additional or a cancelled trip the night previously. Missing a call because of company error will be very embarrassing and won’t help you to establish a good service reputation.

Scheduling Your “On Call” Drivers

The high majority of our drivers are full-time employees. We do have one driver that works exclusively after hours and on the weekends. He’s a great worker and a very rare find. And even though he earns commission only, we do consider him full-time.

But also, we have two part-time employees that we use mostly on an “as-needed” basis. They’re Jim and Carl, the two gentlemen I was referring to earlier. If we’re short handed or if we have a distance trip we might use Jim and/or Carl.

In regards to our company, our employee dynamics (full-time, part-time, hourly versus commission pay, etc.) has proven to work very well for us. But depending on the size of your business and the needs of your community, your dynamics might vary. Like us, you might have some employees that serve only after-hours and the rest may be regular-hour employees that you schedule on a rotation.

If you do have to schedule regular-hour employees to work your evening shifts you’ll have to develop an effective rotation schedule. Exactly how you develop this schedule
is entirely up to you and your need(s) but it better work effectively! The last thing you
want is confusion or miscommunication leading to drivers not showing up when
necessary.

I recommend posting a calendar in your office and set a schedule, at least, one month in
advance. This is what we have done for as long as I’ve been with Joel and we have had
no problems. It works out great! The calendar is posted right by the door for everyone
to see and view well in advance. And, the only people allowed to make changes to the
schedule are either Joel or me. And because we’re giving our people a month advance
notice it helps to limit excuses or last minute changes that would otherwise leave us
hanging without a driver to cover calls.

As always, unexpected events do come up. When they do we allow drivers to switch
nights with other drivers. As long as there’s enough drivers scheduled to cover all of the
calls we don’t have a problem with drivers changing their scheduled rotations. However,
again, any and all changes must be approved by either me or Joel. If one of us doesn’t
make the changes on the calendar then the changes aren’t official.

Needless to say, I encourage you to have a strict policy regarding who is allowed to
make changes to the schedule. The more people you have and the more people you
allow access to the calendar the greater your chances for confusion and error.

In establishing your monthly schedule, I suggest that you first ask for volunteers.
Serving on-call is not hard and, as an employee, you can make more money if you’re
paid via commission. Therefore, if you have some motivated drivers that want to make
some extra money, they may be willing to volunteer for the extra work.

We have some motivated drivers that are single with no family or other obligations so
they’re prime candidates for after-hour work. And as Joel always says, “Never deny
someone the opportunity to make money if there’s an opportunity to make money!” So if
there’s work to be performed and someone wishes to volunteer for the work we try to
give it to them.
In creating your monthly schedule, if you can’t get enough volunteers to cover your after-hours work you don’t need to “trouble” other drivers. If this is not the case and you do have to assign people to work an evening/weekend rotation, let it be no secret to any of your current or prospective employees that he/she must be prepared to serve on-call as per your scheduled rotation.

Your drivers may have to serve at least one night a week, once every other week, or whatever you need to schedule based upon your volume of business and your number of drivers.

In regards to your evening manager/driver, he/she must be very responsible and capable of multi-tasking. This is a very important point. Your evening manager will be responsible for driving, answering phone calls, documenting transports on your Daily Time Schedule, and also dispatching calls to other drivers when necessary. The other drivers will be responsible for completing scheduled transports and other trips as directed by your evening manager.

And don’t forget, it’s important that all your drivers document what trips they completed or assisted and the times. Documenting such activity is not only a necessity for accountability purposes, but it also allows you to keep track of how much to pay each driver in commission. So this is where your DME Daily Time Schedule is a great resource. I recommend that you print and give a copy to each of your drivers serving after hours and on the weekends.
Attention to the Detail

Attention to detail is one quality that literally every dispatcher must have and/or become accustomed to. Trust me on this. I’m speaking from first hand experience again. I like to think I have always been an organized and detail oriented person. But once I began dispatching on a daily basis I found myself in situations where more attention to detail would have proven to be more helpful.

My first and more adamant piece of advice when it comes to being detail oriented is to document everything! Again, listen and learn from my mistakes. You have to document everything when it comes to receiving and dispatching calls, customer related issues, and driver related issues. As Joel says and I firmly believe, “When in doubt, document!”

Documenting Customer Related Information

This is another absolutely awesome feature and reason why you need Dispatching Made Easy. I know I sound like a saleswoman, but I’m really not trying to be one! I just know what works best for us and I’m confident it can work well for you and your business too! It’s one of those why “reinvent the wheel” again if you don’t have to?

With DME, you have an unlimited space to document as much information as is necessary for each customer and each transport. Below is a snapshot that illustrates how with DME you can capture all necessary and relevant information when creating a new or editing an existing customer account:

- Name of client and name of third party billing party if necessary
- Telephone number
- Home address & Billing address if different
- Medicaid versus Private Pay
- Comments section
And with this comments section you can document any particulars regarding each individual client; which door to enter, requires special assistance, or anything that is uniquely pertinent for each client.

Documenting all possible particulars is a help to you, other dispatchers, and your drivers. Anyone that’s dispatching can view the “Customer Details” and review all information regarding individual client accounts. If there’s a problem or concern a dispatcher can read over the comments and relay any necessary information to a driver.

For example, we recently had a driver go to pick up a new client. The driver contacted us (dispatch) stating that the client wasn’t answering the door. By referring to the “Customer Details” we were able to determine that this new client is hard of hearing and prefers that drivers use the back door versus the front door. We were able to call the client, let him know that the driver is there, and also direct the driver to the back door. All of this was possible because we documented this information when creating the customer’s account.
Documenting Trip Related Information

Documenting specific trip related information is absolutely critical because there’s significant room for error if you’re not careful. If the client is being discharged from a hospital or traveling from a nursing facility it’s very unlikely that the client will be contacting you directly to make travel arrangements. Rather, in 99.9% of such cases the transports will be arranged via a unit secretary, a nurse, a facility dispatcher, or some other third party.

When you receive a call you begin by typing in the customer’s name. When you do, their personal information is retrieved and displayed automatically.

However, I absolutely and strongly encourage you to document the name of the “Person Calling.” You need to document this information because if there is ever a dispute over the trip itself and/or the responsible billing party, you can always refer to the person that set up the transport and associated info.

You’ll also notice that with DME you can document mileage, trip specifics, payment info, and necessary billing info. Again, the billing information, the name of the person approving the transport, the date of approval, and any possible “Approval Number or Code” could prove to be very important when working to get paid.
But what I strongly encourage you to do in the “Comments” section is to document the exact times that you receive calls from hospitals and doctor offices indicating when a patient is ready to be returned to their place of origin. This is a very important habit to get into because periodically you’ll have someone make a second call ten or fifteen minutes after making their first call and they’ll complain that they called 45 minutes prior.

Now, when someone makes this second call you know they’re full of it and they’re just trying to somehow guilt you into getting you there faster! But if you can correct them by referring to your notes in the “Comments” section and give them the exact time you received the first call it usually shuts them up pretty quick. Plus, because you’re so organized they’ll quickly learn that they’re not going to be able to call and harass your office to try and get you there any faster!

As a side note, as a dispatcher you’ll discover that periodically frantic secretaries, nurses or others will contact you and, because they’re having a bad day, they’ll just be snotty and like nothing more than to ruin your day too!

But don’t even waste your time engaging in such nonsense. And believe me, as your business grows and you get more and more clients you’ll find this little tidbit of info to be true. But rather than get frustrated by someone else’s rudeness, just let your detailed notes and facts support your efforts. You’ll find that documentation is your best friend!

Getting back on point, I also strongly encourage you to document when your drivers go in route and when they complete with each patient. It only takes a quick second, so do it!

New drivers might forget to call complete and in route, but this is where you as a dispatcher must be diligent in further helping them with their training. If they forget to call complete or in route, remind them ASAP so that they continue to develop the habit.

There are a few reasons why you want your drivers calling in route and complete.
First, it helps with your planning. Knowing exactly where each driver is in the transportation process gives you a really good idea where they are and how quickly they can respond to following transports.

But secondly, it goes back to protecting yourself and “covering your butt.” You’ll generally know where your drivers are all the time while on duty and if ever there’s a question or complaint knowing the details of each transport, the times the driver went in route and when the driver completed, can prove to be a big help.

Again, I’m speaking from experience so I hope that you’ll trust in the importance to document these “small” yet very important details with each transport.

**Documenting Driver Related Information**

Ironically enough, during our most recent two year audit by the New York State Inspector General’s Office, the purpose to ensure that we’re compliant with the Department of Health’s Social Services Program, the Inspector marveled at DME and said “Everyone should be using this software.”

Now again, please understand that I’m not trying to be a great DME saleswoman here. Rather, I’m just encouraging every dispatcher to make his/her job that much easier by using this already existing cost effective easy-to-use system.

With DME you can also track statistics for an unlimited period of time for each of your drivers. This awesome feature allows you to see who is and is not productive.
Tracking your driver’s statistics is feasible because of their “Driver Codes.” Driver Codes are assigned by you, the dispatcher, to each transport and, thus, allows you to calculate unique statistics for each client, each driver, and each vehicle.

For us, we use driver initials as the Driver Codes but you can use any method or code that works best for you.

You’ll also notice the “Comments” section under the Driver Details. This is a great place to document any pertinent information regarding your individual drivers. And like other “Comments” sections in DME, there is no limit to the amount of data that you can enter in this field. Therefore, you can keep an unlimited amount of data and information on each of your drivers in this section.

And this leads me to my next point regarding the importance of documentation. As you read this, you might be the owner of your company or you might be an employee. But it really doesn’t matter when it comes to stressing the following point. As the dispatcher and a primary leader of your company, you are in a prominent position that demands that you document any possible problems or issues with drivers.
Like every legal business entity, your company is required by law to maintain employee files for each employee. As a minimum, these files will include employee applications, proof of US citizenship, and related payroll information.

But in our company, we also maintain a great deal of additional information for each driver for which you’ll most likely want to consider doing the same.

In our employee files we include copies of all Incident/Accident Reports. Incident/Accident Reports are standard documents that are included in each driver’s Equipment Box that they sign out at the beginning of their shift and then sign back in at the end of their shift. Our drivers are required to fill this reports out immediately if/when a driver is involved in a vehicular accident, they encounter an issue with a client, or if they witness or are a part of anything that’s deemed worthy of documentating.

These reports are then submitted and reviewed by me and eventually passed onto Joel, the owner, for him to take action if necessary and to store in the employee’s file indefinitely for possible future reference.

However, one idea that I have also found to be very useful and helpful is to maintain an “open” file for each driver. For me, this “open” file is literally a notebook that I keep by my desk, one for each driver. I document anything positive or negative on each driver.

For example, if I or one of our other dispatchers has a problem with a driver, I document it. If a driver does something good such as going out of his/her way to help a client, I document that too. If a driver shows up to work late, I document it. If a driver is involved in any kind of an issue, I document it.

The reason I keep this “open” file is for a few reasons.

First, it reminds me to pursue and follow up with certain issues. I can get very busy dispatching and assisting Joel with other projects. So by documenting specific issues I can refer back to them quickly to refresh my memory.
Secondly, I review my notes weekly and tell Joel who is and is not worthy of a weekly cash bonus. If a driver showed up late to work that week or did something else that is counterproductive, that driver will not get a weekly cash bonus. Also, Joel reviews these notebooks at least once a month to help determine which employee has done a great job and should be awarded the “Employee of the Month” and earn another cash bonus.

Thirdly, drivers know that I keep and refer to these records often and that Joel also reviews them. Thus, it automatically serves as both a kind of deterrent for making poor decisions and a source of motivation to do well. When drivers do something well it gets documented. When they do something foolish that too gets documented.

But an even bigger reason why you should always be documenting everything is because it can protect you and your company. I can assure you that there will be times that driver’s, or any employee, will do something that warrants formal counseling.

In our company, counseling is either done by Joel and/or me, serving as the Office Manager. These counseling sessions are followed up by a written Counseling Statement indicating the cause and effect and the outcome of the counseling session and then signed by the driver/employee to be kept as a permanent record in their employee file. And as I just mentioned, such records can and will protect you and you and your company.

For example, if you have a less than reputable employee that quits and then tries to file for unemployment you can refer to your notes and documentation. If this driver voluntarily quits he will not qualify for unemployment insurance benefits. If you have to fire an employee for misconduct and, with the help of your notes and counseling statements, you can prove that this employee was warned several times previously, again, he/she will not qualify for unemployment insurance benefits.

Furthermore, should a former employee or anyone ever try and sue you and/or bring any kind of legal or formal action against you and your company your notes, records, and documentation will absolutely be your best friend!
First, your notes and documentation will refresh your memory of the facts and issues. And secondly, your documentation can be used as evidence to your benefit.

So regardless of what method works best for you, just make sure that you’re very much organized, detail oriented, and that you’re documenting everything. Remember, documentation is your best friend!
Leave Your Problems at the Door

In speaking from experience, no two days are ever the same as a dispatcher or in the transportation industry in general. And I just finished discussing a wide variety of topics with you that, if you’re new to this business, might seem a bit intimidating or maybe a little overwhelming.

But again, in speaking from personal experience, being an effective dispatcher is a worthy and rewarding experience. Your job is important within your company and to many people outside your company – many of whom you’ll never meet in person, but they’ll appreciate your efforts immensely!

Like any job, there will be both good and bad days. Periodically you’ll have frustrated people calling and seeking your help and others just calling to vent their frustrations.

Sometimes you’ll have driver related issues that are frustrating but, none the less, require your prompt and detailed attention. And all the while you’ll be busy coordinating other transports, dispatching other drivers, receiving calls, making calls, documenting information, creating invoices and more.

But again, in speaking from experience, I wouldn’t have it any other way. Since working for Joel and becoming a dispatcher I have learned a ton, expanded my managerial skills, met many new people, and formed many new friendships.

As Joel always says, “You need to check your baggage at the door.” Joel explains and periodically repeats this to all his employees and once upon a time I really didn’t understand what he really meant. But after becoming a dispatcher and then being promoted to Office Manager I quickly realized what “checking your baggage at the door” really means.
The days in which you become stressed or flustered you have to leave your problems at the door as you leave for the day! Seriously, this is a very big point. “Check your baggage at the door” as you leave and when you return.

If you had a problem with a driver, do everything to resolve it quickly and return the next day with a new “start” and a new attitude. Don’t let your frustrations or displeasures carry over to the next day. The last thing you want to do is start your work day with a less than favorable disposition. Remember, you’re a problem solver for so many people. If you’re having a bad day it will show in your voice and attitude as you speak with customers, facilities, and your drivers.

And this suggestion also applies to people whom you talk with over the phone. If you have a conflict with a customer, nurse, unit secretary, or other, don’t let it fester. Work to resolve it as soon as possible and move on because chances are extremely good that you’re going to have to work with these people again. So whatever the problem, resolve it and move on!

When you’re away from the office, stay away! Don’t take your problems home with you. “Check your baggage at the door” as you leave. Again, I’m sure that this suggestion is applicable to wherever you might work, but it’s also true as a dispatcher.

Every evening I return to a nice home and a beautiful daughter. The last thing I want to do is drag home any “drama” or tension that would prevent me from enjoying my time with her or my personal time with friends and family. And I’m sure that you feel the same way. But wanting and doing are two different things.

I know that some of my advice may be easier said than done, but it really is important. And, it’s a skill that you seriously and legitimately have to force yourself to work on.

There have been many times where I have been stressed and literally had to stop, regroup, and “decompress” so as to regain my sanity. And I’m sure that as your business grows, there will be many times that you’re going to have to practice and perfect similar tactics.
I mentioned previously the importance of being loyal to your customers, your fellow employees, and your company in general. But if you’re like me and you’re an employee of the company and not the owner, I’m definitely speaking to you now!

Regardless of whom you are, whom you work for, your company, or your position, loyalty is a must.

I am not the owner of our company. Rather, I began working for Joel on a part-time basis on July 15, 2002. Obviously, since starting with him my roles and responsibilities have since changed and expanded well beyond anything I could have imagined. I have been promoted, made more money, given opportunities to enjoy new experiences, met many new people, formed many new friendships and much more. And I like to think that all of this has been possible because Joel has trusted in me and my abilities.

Over the years I have collected, handled, and allocated untold amounts of Joel’s money. I have been entrusted to collect money on his behalf, write checks on his behalf, and make various monetary and other business decisions on his behalf. All of this has been possible because I have been loyal to Joel, the owner, and have worked hard to protect him, his business, his company, and my job!

Like all of our employees, when I first began working for Joel he explained to me his “Buying into the House” mentality. And he regularly reminds all of us of this principal and encourages us to practice it on a daily basis. Needless to say, I have bought into this philosophy and do everything I can to help ensure that all our employees do too.

Basically, the “Buying into the House” mentality is Joel’s principal that employees should take ownership of the company, the company’s interests, the company’s equipment, and the company’s resources as it is their own. When they do, the company will save more money, the company will generate more money, and the company will experience greater profits! And realistically, this helps to protect and preserve all our jobs!
Think about how much more efficient and profitable your business will be if everyone worked and treated the business as if they were the actual owners. If you and all your drivers operated and cared for your company vehicles, equipment, and resources like is your personally owned property do you think you would save money? Do you think your maintenance costs would go down? Sure they would! Drivers wouldn’t “ride” the breaks excessively, waste gas, or drive vehicles recklessly. And the same principles apply to office personnel.

If you were personally paying for the office supplies, the resources, the telephone bill, and more, would you be wasteful with the resources? No. Would you make unnecessary long distance phone calls? No. And the examples go on and on.

Bottom line, if you want to make more money, impress your boss, and be entrusted with greater responsibilities then you have to “Buy into the House” and you have to be loyal. Be honest. Be respectful. Be considerate. Be trustworthy. Be positive. Be supportive. And be understanding of your owner, his/her needs and expectations, and your company in general. When you do, only good things can happen!

And remember, as a dispatcher you’re automatically in a leadership position. So find a way to positively lead and lead by example.

As Joel says, “Just because you’re in a leadership position it doesn’t automatically make you a leader!” But in my opinion, if you use and put into practice the many strategies that I’ve expressed in Dispatching for Dollars and Joel’s many other resources I know that you’re going to be well on your way to leading your company to efficiency and profitability.

I hope that you’ve enjoyed reading and learning from this resource as much as I’ve enjoyed working to prepare it for you. I hope that you’re able to take some of these strategies and put them into everyday use to make and save your company more and more money!

Wishing you all the success in the world,

Kathryn J. Thayer