

FPO



How Cultivating a Positive Shipper-Carrier Relationship Helps Both Succeed

By Sherry Meddley, Sr. Director Customer Service Operations

In this article we look at how approaching the shipper-carrier relationship with both the proper mindset and collaboration can help ensure the most positive outcomes across the board. We also explore how the most fruitful partnerships are based on open and honest communication, trust, and a bit of healthy mutual dependence.

There are several “moments of truth” in every business partnership.

Like in any relationship, there are countless times that key decisions to share timely information, go the extra mile, or take responsibility for a mistake are what end up setting a service provider apart from the competition. Given the highly competitive nature of the transportation industry, particularly in this post pandemic environment, companies that encourage employees to communicate openly and honestly and to make decisions based on what is best for the customer, are the ones that stand to cultivate the longest-lasting and most successful partnerships with shippers.

The shipper/carrier relationship is unique. The carrier acts as a conduit, fundamentally an intermediary, responsible for handling the shippers' goods with care and delivering them on time and without exception. Those goods might be going to the shipper's own locations or to a third party. Ultimately, the carrier



is an extension of the shipper's brand, and we take that to heart. The movement of those items often span great distances and facilitates both consumer and commercial transactions that drive commerce.

More directly, shippers are motivated by factors such as ensuring that they have merchandise in their warehouses

to distribute, in their stores to sell and that they fulfill their own customer obligations to perpetuate those continued relationships. Shippers, too, are motivated to build their reputation for dependability and customer service to maintain and build relationships that will benefit their businesses in the long term. With so much riding on the successful transport of goods, every decision, action, and response matters.

Roadrunner's Smart Long-Haul network makes us the Smart Choice. We know that Smart Shippers choose Roadrunner for our reliable LTL freight network, knowledgeable and award-winning

team, and our industry-leading technology, all of which make it easy to do business with us. We approach each shipment like we own it, and we strive to be a carrier of choice. In fact, while it may surprise some to learn this, we actively seek out shippers that are vested in approaching the shipping process like a joint venture; one where we and they both have an equal interest in the success of the other partner. Experience has shown us that both the carrier and shipper benefit from approaching the relationship with this type of mindset, leveraging their distinct skillsets to ensure mutual success and provide the best customer service.

Carriers and shippers, in fact, should recognize that they each have the inherent ability to make it easy (or hard) to do business with one another. Whether it is the tone of a sales call, the readiness of the freight at the agreed upon pick-up time, or the accuracy and timeliness with which invoices are prepared and paid, each action and touchpoint on both sides of this equation presents an opportunity to nurture and perpetuate the successful outcomes of such a partnership. Equally important to recognize is the fact that there are multiple opportunities to derail such relationships along the way, with the leading cause often being a failure to communicate openly and clearly. There are critical points when the carrier and shipper have opportunities to discuss expectations, progress, and results. Too often, however, one of these parties—and in some cases both—fails to recognize that the partnership is a two-way street, and that the strongest and most lasting business relationships require a lot of honest communication and a healthy dose of thoughtful and constructive feedback.

Many innovative technologies in logistics are helping to increase transparency in carrier and shipper transactions and the ease with which this can be achieved. Shippers are getting more accustomed to tracking their shipments at every stage and monitoring them in near real time for exceptions, delays, and other purposes. As a result, carriers should expect that, with increasing frequency, new and long-standing customers alike will increasingly demand high-touch and highly accurate feedback at every point of contact. This is an expectation that we are observing across every stage of the supply chain and one that is, being widely met by leveraging and adapting tools and capabilities—in many cases initially developed for internal purposes—to empower external users/customers and foster a “joint venture approach” to doing business. Doing so serves to ensure that carriers and shippers remain in sync and well-coordinated.

While modern technologies are improving efficiency, reducing human error, and making real-time information accessible across the supply chain, employees on both sides of the shipper/carrier equation still need to be supported, trained, and encouraged to communicate proactively. Company cultures on both the shipper and carrier sides, which embrace transparency and work at teaching employees how to communicate effectively and consistently, are likely to be better equipped than their counterparts to foster and maintain mutually beneficial relationships over time and endure the types of challenges that often end lesser arrangements.



“Equally important to recognize is the fact that there are multiple opportunities to derail such relationships along the way, with the leading cause often being a failure to openly and clearly communicate.”

Practical Ways for Carriers to Foster Open Communication

Saying that communication and accountability are integral to success is easy. Instilling a commitment to make sure both happen consistently in an organization is hard work. In our efforts on the carrier side of the equation at Roadrunner, we have found it effective to model positive communication skills through our customer interactions and our everyday internal interactions. We stress the importance of our leaders setting the tone, sharing experiences with employees, and demonstrating how to talk to customers about everyday issues and more complex matters.

For carriers, each customer and partner conversation is an opportunity to bring the vision and values of the company to life. As such, it can be highly beneficial to train staff to treat every interaction, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, like a “moment of truth.” This empowers team members to better understand that their actions have an important and lasting impact in shaping the relationship and ensuring the success of each shipment. We build Smart Teams, where employees learn to not only meet but exceed expectations daily, a critical skill to possess when more challenging and difficult issues occur. Each of those employee experiences creates opportunities to share key learnings and effective solutions across the organization. These can be conveyed both informally between employees and via more formal methods including training manuals, videos, and role play exercises.

A Carrier's "Moments of Truth" Checklist for Delivering a Best-in-Class Customer Experience

Sales Inquiry

- Are all the shipper's questions answered?
- Is the information easy to find and comprehensive?
- Did the shipper book the shipment?

Scheduling

- Is the scheduling process easy and efficient?
- Can the shipper share important details about the shipment?
- Can the shipper adjust requirements, if needed?

Confirmation

- Is a BOL (Bill of Lading) with all the pertinent details sent promptly?
- Is the shipper given all the information they need to prepare the shipment?

Pick-up

- Is the driver on time?
- Is the driver prepared and equipped with all pertinent details of the pick-up and delivery?
- Is the driver courteous and helpful?
- Is the driver asking what else Roadrunner can do to be a better partner?

Delivery

- Is the shipment delivered on time and exception free?
- Is confirmation of delivery sent promptly to the shipper?
- If there is an exception, is it handled professionally and promptly?

Invoice

- Is the invoice accurate?
- Is it easy to read and pay?

Feedback

- Is the shipper given the opportunity to share feedback?
- Is constructive feedback shared throughout the organization?
- Is there a call to action when the feedback uncovers opportunities for improvement?
- Is positive feedback shared and celebrated?

Review

- Are we touching base across departments to discover ways to grow the partnership/do more business with the shipper?

"...We know that Smart Shippers choose Roadrunner for our reliable LTL freight network, knowledgeable and award-winning team, and our industry-leading technology."

Lastly, we strongly believe that an open communication culture should actively solicit, share, and act upon customer and partner feedback to continuously improve service. This contributes to all parties across the organization gaining a thorough understanding of external expectations and pulling their weight to ensure sustained and mutually beneficial relationships. From drivers, dock loaders, executives, sales, IT, and accounting teams to the C-suite, there is an opportunity to operate in a best-in-class fashion, regardless of whether a role is customer facing or not.

Roadrunner is the smart choice for shippers looking to move freight quickly and reliably at a great value. Our optimized, data-driven network moves direct from metro to metro without rail and with full visibility. As the most flexible nationwide LTL long haul carrier, we partner with experienced owner operators and teams drivers. More than 1,000 IC drivers leverage our network to empower their businesses and are motivated to deliver freight on time, intact, and damage free. With 1,250 employees, Roadrunner specializes in Smart Long Haul™, metro-to-metro shipping and has more direct routes between its 36 service centers than its traditional hub and spoke peers. Demonstrating a significant reduction in rail use, 100% of Roadrunner's miles are run by drivers. Roadrunner's Net Promoter Score (NPS), an indicator of customer willingness to recommend a company's services, jumped 26%. Roadrunner was recognized by Newsweek as one of America's Most Trustworthy Companies in 2022.

[Click here to learn more about shipping with Roadrunner.](#)

Capitalizing on those opportunities serves to solidify trust and confidence, not only with customers, but also with important partners and intermediaries who are critical to achieving overall success in the shipper/carrier ecosystem.



Sherry Meddley
Senior Director of the
Customer Service Operations
Center at Roadrunner

Sherry is responsible for the strategic planning and execution of all Contact Center Operations. She focuses on management of processes for the continuous improvement of the customer experience. Sherry enjoys being part of the positive changes that are taking place at Roadrunner.

Sherry has over 30 years of experience working in Customer Contact Centers, most recently as the Customer Experience Director of the East Region for AAA. Sherry spent over 19 years working as an Assistant VP and Director of the FirstMerit Bank Contact Center. Sherry received a Bachelor of Business Administration from Franklin University and a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management from Strayer University. In her free time, Sherry enjoys event and party planning and decorating. She loves seeing the finished product of these events and helping make dreams come true.

Contact Sherry at: sherry.meddley@rrts.com