

The Paradigm Shift - Driver Coaching

The UK is slipping down the global road safety charts, and has recently descended from 3rd to 6th position. It looks like

the benefits from engineering interventions to reduce the frequency and severity of crashes have pretty much been maximised. We now have safer cars in which to have crashes and safer roads on which to have them. In our lifetime, it is unlikely that we will solve the road safety problem by focusing on engineering interventions alone - so we'd better get on with tackling the source of the problem - driver attitudes and behaviour.

The DSA's proposed reforms to the training and testing of drivers finally acknowledges that teaching people to drive focuses too heavily on developing vehicle handling skills and that competencies at all levels of the Goals for Driver Education matrix must be acquired. What has not been made clear is how to do this effectively. With clear leadership, we could have the start of a major paradigm shift from driver training to driver coaching in the UK. There is one problem though - a far wider remit of knowledge and skills for the ADI industry is required for this to get under way, yet there is no clear strategy so far about how the new reforms will be achieved in practice.

Whilst we wait to hear the outcome of the consultation document and then watch the protracted business of changing the industry towards a more coaching-oriented approach, I'd like to discuss two major support mechanisms that can help ADIs develop the knowledge and skills that are needed right now. But firstly, I'd like to provide an outline of what driver coaching actually is, as it tends to be shrouded in misunderstandings.

Driver Coaching

Coaching Psychology has been defined as the systematic application of behavioural science to the enhancement of life experience for individuals, groups and organisations. It involves working with people who have no clinically significant mental health issues or abnormal level of distress, and helping them focus on behavioural goals in order to



enhance performance and well-being. There is every reason to suppose that coaching that's aimed at examining the strengths and resources of the driver, in order to address their behaviour, is likely to be as successful in changing behaviour as it has been for other health-related issues, even addictive ones such as smoking and drug taking. Driver coaching sessions are distinctly different from standard instructional methods. Driver coaching is about employing strategies that focus on influencing the internal context of driver beliefs, and this can only be reliably achieved with the use of psychological methods. It is about raising awareness, developing

responsibility and motivating the learner to make the right decisions in traffic, and this is done by building on the physical, emotional and intellectual experiences of the coachee. Coaching provides the coachee with the opportunity to marshal their resources for effective change, and the emphasis is on coachees addressing their at-risk driver behaviour whilst inviting them to take responsibility through self-reflection. Self-reflection is a critical process requiring active learning methods, reflecting upon personal experiences, motives, self-evaluations and personalised feedback. The principles are that drivers are made aware of the

contradictions between their behaviour and attitudes. Research shows that becoming more conscious of hypocrisy leads to a change in behaviour through greater awareness. But the driving teacher has to be careful about the way in which this self-reflection process is utilised. The framing of messages in tailored interventions is critical.

Learning Support

Clearly, these are psychologically-based knowledge and skills and ADIs cannot be expected to acquire these competencies without support. There are two different but related support mechanisms that are currently in place to help ADIs develop a more coaching-oriented approach. They are firstly a major European Union project called 'HERMES', which looks at coaching and optimal communication skills for driving instructors and, secondly, a new professional qualification in Driver Behaviour and Education.

HERMES

The HERMES project began in March 2007 and will be completed in 2010. It focuses on creating an easy-to-use training package for driving teachers based on the principles of how to coach. A multi-national team of experienced driving teachers, psychologists and educational and coaching experts has been assembled for this purpose, and HERMES will draw on existing experience of coaching methods in driver training and on expert advice in the wider discipline of coaching. The end result will be a highly practical training package for new and experienced driving teachers to follow, including:

- What is coaching - the principles of coaching
- Why coach - aims and rationale of coaching in driver training
- When, and when not, to coach - practical application in driver training
- How to coach - methods to be used by the driving teachers
- Scenarios for coaching - training exercises

The course documentation will include the training-of-trainers, audiovisual support, user manuals and practical coaching scenarios for learner and novice driver



training. The complete package will be tested and evaluated in a pilot project, and then adapted appropriately as a result. The training is likely to be a 2 day + 1 day + 1 day format, with time in between for participants to employ their new found skills in practice. The project team recently issued its state-of-the-art report on coaching, which outlines and explains the principles and process of coaching in the context of driver training (for learner/novice drivers) and sets the foundation for the next stage - and core - of the project: the development of a training package for driving instructors on how to coach. (see www.cieca.be/news_en.pp?id=231)

MSc in Driver Behaviour and Education

It is not part of an ADI's portfolio of skills to be up to date with the latest research on driver behaviour. There is no expectation that they should be able to tackle the thorny issue of attitudes amongst their pupils. Given the wide gap between current practice in the industry and academic knowledge of driver behaviour and education, I designed a new professional qualification - the MSc in Driver Behaviour and Education. The MSc is offered from October 2008 at Cranfield University, Bedfordshire and students can spend up to five years gaining the qualification. Driver behaviour and education is a cross-disciplinary topic with a corpus of academic literature underpinning its discipline. To train students in the knowledge and skills required, the MSc is based on academic rigour across 10 modules:

- The first two modules provide a fundamental background in 'Human Factors' and 'Human Performance and Error' to give students a solid grounding in Psychology.
- An introductory module on 'Driver Education' enables students to fully grasp the implications of the Goals for Driver Education hierarchy.
- For 'Individual Differences in Driving Behaviour', personality and emotional differences in driving are covered with particular reference to traffic offending behaviour.

- Students are taught to critically evaluate educational practices such as road safety campaigns, simulator-based driver training, group discussions etc in terms of their success in influencing driver behaviour.
- 'Driver Stress and Fatigue' considers definitions and theories of driver impairment including physiological effects and countermeasures.
- To ensure students are able to undertake their own research on driver behaviour and education, a module on 'Research Methods and Statistics' is delivered.
- The next module on 'Cognitive Development of Driver Skill' enables students to evaluate key perceptual and attentional theories in driving, including brain development, driver distraction and effects of in-vehicle technologies.
- 'Drink and Drug Driving' requires students to critically evaluate the effect of alcohol and drug taking on driving performance.
- Finally, the module on 'Road Traffic Accident Analysis' ensures that students acquire a systematic knowledge of the multifarious nature of accidents and accident statistics. (For further details see www.cranfield.ac.uk/soe/postgraduatestudy/driver/index.jsp)

Conclusion

There are major challenges ahead if we are to implement the new driver coaching paradigm in the UK, to move road safety and driver education forward. Traffic Psychologists and road safety professionals have failed to communicate effectively with each other in the past, but each group must be open-minded to the skills and expertise of the other in order to advance a new approach to educating drivers for today's roads. It will involve a rethink of current methods used by Addis to develop new skills, accept new tools and utilise new methods. Making strides towards this goal will truly drive standards higher and may even put us back at the top of the charts. **adi**



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