

# A Fieldwork Profile of Yellow

a free publication

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## 1 | Enter Yellow

The last of the Big 3 has disappeared. Consolidated Freightways, Roadway Express, and Yellow Freight are all gone. They couldn't navigate through the current business climate. One more carcass is getting picked clean. The money managers and law firms have arrived. And trailing behind that activity is a long chain of opinions and beliefs that come with big closures. Discussing Yellow on an internet basis might seem improper, and while the company was in business I would agree. However, keeping our dirty laundry to ourselves no longer applies. What Yellow truck drivers and Yellow dock workers are saying on the web isn't going to cost the company any business. The Yellow cadaver won't get hurt.

So where do we begin? How about with a simple greeting. However you arrived, I'm honored that you are here. If you worked at Yellow and gave the job a legitimate effort, then know that this work is especially for you.

Please forget the LTL business climate for a moment. It's important, but that's not our focus at all. We need to adjust our vision and set it upon ourselves. It's time to get dropped onto a flat plane full of doors at a west coast consolidation center within the Yellow system of terminals. And it's time to look around. Everything else is secondary. We need to shelve items like pricing and revenue per shipment. Let's just assume that the shipments Yellow picked up and delivered were worth the company's time. If they weren't, that's an important discussion but we need to hold it. Right now, the priority is a willingness to lift the Yellow hood and look at many of the working designs that the company was directing, especially those problematic designs that suddenly emerged within Yellow's rollout period.

Many people believe that the Yellow ship was scuttled. And I respect that belief especially if Yellow was their home. More powerful a belief would be that the entire drama was choreographed by those who have access to boatloads of cash, who are looking to make more of that cash in some strange enterprise that not only increases their cash holdings, but like the old cliché, kills two birds with one stone, in effect, pulling apart the business like a cash piñata while simultaneously knocking out labor with a drawn out and prolonged corporate sucker punch. However, that notion is still a belief. After all, something like that would take a lot of work. It would take a lot of planning. It would take some collaboration. And it would take a lot of balls. There's always the chance of getting caught.

No matter how suspect the company's vision, the big plan at Yellow never materialized. Everything came off track. All the buyouts, all the mergers, all the dovetails, all the changes of operations, all the repositioning, all the so-called synergies, all the concessions, all the loans, and all the other Yellow maneuverings led to nothing positive. Now a giant dust cloud has arrived. It's time for the fire sale. Things move quickly. Money exchanges hands. All of it is way beyond us. And in the end, none of that is our focus. Our goal is twofold. First, we need to side step beliefs and maintain a focus on what worked at Yellow, and what didn't work. Second, we need to arrive on a flat working plane and look around. Maybe together, we might be able to see something unexpected come into view.

But first, we need an actual starting point. For some of us, Yellow was our home. We were a collection of different people, many of whom arrived differently. We need to understand that people here affected the business differently, for better or worse. No matter what the headwinds were, Yellow didn't collapse by accident. People were either responsible, or they weren't. There were internal pressures at Yellow that expedited the company's destruction.

The time for people who sit behind desks, opinionated people who summarize the demise of Yellow, that time is over. It's time to push aside all of those well-written opinion pieces that outside experts have offered. Those industry experts have shed their own light on Yellow. Now it's time for the insiders. It's time for those people who were in the Yellow work trenches to have one final say. It's time to peel back the roof on this place, and to really look around. And it's time to understand how self-inflicted wounds can negatively impact the future of a company. In later chapters we will get to the concrete, that plane of space surrounded by doors. Once we know where we really are, then we can begin an examination of faulty parts.

With respect to all the big items that contributed to Yellow's collapse, meaning macro items which fall outside the skin, our focus will continue to be on the dock designs that Yellow rolled out, tools that contributed to the failure of achieving adequate cube. Specifically, where did Yellow grossly fail? It's time to take the Yellow dock design apart, anything which factored into its erroneous rollout design will be laid out. We're going to let it sit there naked, grease and all. We're not concerned with cleaning up anything, making parts shiny and presentable. That wouldn't be a fair and accurate examination. This is akin to an airline disaster, and it requires an examination of parts. With Yellow Freight, there were trouble spots all over the place.

We do have a problem. The scenery was constantly shifting, things would appear, things would disappear. The snapshots of the Tracy carnival kept changing. The doors kept moving around. But one thing was for certain, there was an obscene failure to achieve adequate cube on an outbound basis during very critical hours of the night, at a time when there were no viable witnesses. It was like the damage didn't happen. But it did happen, and the system was forced to absorb this new business strangeness, this new roll-out way of doing things. Like a shell game, available experience was moved aside. Satellite work was saved for inexperienced others. And those inexperienced others worked satellite freight on the Tracy dock. In effect, unproven products were cut loose on the terminal. This collective activity worked wonders as real freight handling quality was thrown right out the cab window. It was toxic, and it was being done on massive levels. Poor running cube was accumulating within a succession of

misplaced load doors on the Tracy dock. And for Yellow Corporation, there was no going back. They were committed to this roll-out thing. It was their design. We are now free to discuss it.

No photography will help us. No videos will prove our point. This requires a different type of work. We must look at those designs and study them hard. They are branded 813 and are set into record. These are the property of Yellow Corporation because Yellow Corporation instituted them. Yellow's management team reinforced them. And no matter who argues for or against these Yellow designs, they were designs that produced horrible results. And those results had to happen, the designs forced them to happen. That's the whole point. That much is certain. Proving anything more by going back in time takes a different type of work. It takes professional expertise.

The designs that Yellow instituted can't be denied. They were thrown down onto a flat plane. And Yellow broke some rules which were so basic to the LTL arena that they can't be justified. People might try to validate some of those designs, and there might be revisionist history efforts by those who constructed them. Maybe they didn't quite work that way, or maybe they didn't even exist. But even with memories fading, there are too many witnesses. No matter how ugly, it's not a time to shy away from looking at a large dock operation that was completely transformed. People may have been afraid to discuss it while Yellow was in business. But that shy away period has passed.

What is interesting, travelers weren't shy about expressing their opinions. They saw pieces of the new rollout design firsthand, but that's all they were, just roll-out pieces. Travelers were mostly dayshift and swing shift participants called on by the company to get 813 caught up. And like everyone else away from graveyard, they weren't in a position to look directly at the utility driver debacle. It was a nightly event that they couldn't see. However, the pieces that travelers did see prompted opinion and concern. Travelers were looking at a consolidation center in Tracy that was a complete disaster area, a work environment that was collectively following an overtly weird business plan. Many of the travelers were just shaking their heads as they went about their business. It's safe to assume that many of them went home and reported what they

saw. Although they were pulling down some extra dough on their working visits, what they saw was obviously troubling because in Tracy we were hearing their echoes, questions and remarks the sounds of like . . .

*Our barn works a lot better than this new rollout.  
We're going to do this shit system wide?  
And the company is in the process  
of fucking up our place next?  
No way will it work!*

And of course, it didn't work. It all ended. It's history. But before we close the chapter on Yellow Freight, let's begin an examination. And no matter what is found, this isn't the time to be loyal to a fault. If we are men, then we must admit folly.

## 2 | Touching Yellow

I don't know how many people were at Local 150 that day, the place was packed. In some corners it was standing room only. I do know that when I started at Consolidated Freightways in 1992, I went to the bottom of the seniority roster at number 228. It was a big terminal with a corresponding big number of workers needed to get the job done. But now the gates were locked, CF had collapsed, closed nationwide on Labor Day, and it caught a big number of us completely off guard. Suddenly, we were unemployed and scrambling to find work. We already knew what the good stepping stones were, and that only so many slots could be filled. CF customers were already finding other companies to move their goods. Workers knew that timing was critical. Who would be able to follow the work and stay in motion at a new carrier? And who would be able to keep their pensions moving?

I think they called it a job fair; it was more than that, it was an expedited emergency meeting of all interested parties. The message had been clearly communicated to everyone who was out of work, *Get your asses down here! No bullshit! Just do it!*

I showed up very early and found a seat right in the middle of the hall. Around me were about 10 guys who I knew well. The whole room contained a low murmur, chattering men in an echo chamber of anticipated tension. Clearly audible, I heard several times,

“There's a lot of people here!”

A business agent from the local opened matters. He introduced a few people and discussed some of the coming agenda. This wasn't some exclusive union meeting one night a month where union matters stay within the walls, where union protocol is expected. This was an open event with prospective employers in clear sight. Guys seated around me identified them and pointed them out. People were trying to figure out exactly who was who. But one thing was certain, the Roadway people were clearly

visible in their navy and orange colors. I saw one near the podium, he looked like he was getting ready to talk next. I saw another one near an adjacent room, and another down back at the entrance of the building.

A business agent continued to speak and most of the eyes in the crowd looked back at him, but some necks were turning. It was easy to see what was about to happen once the last of the speakers commenced. A Roadway representative from the West Sacramento facility had some words about what to expect and where to start if anyone was interested in coming over to Roadway. The introductions were finalizing, and the mood shifted. Some heads in the crowd were moving side to side to get a better view of the stations along the walls. A little guy next to me directed my attention. He pointed to a table where the Roadway people were poised. He said,

"Look Dan! That's where we're going. Get ready."

I didn't really know what my chances were that day. But one thing I did know for certain, I wasn't dripping with confidence. I had grown up at Consolidated Freightways and wasn't a kid anymore. I knew there were some hard realities here. There would be a whole lot of people who were going to get left behind. I had to estimate what my real chances were because there was the stark reality of numbers, the number of people and the number of available jobs. It wasn't time to be overconfident. I didn't know anybody at these other trucking companies. So, I estimated that my chances were fair. How many jobs were there? 20 jobs? 30 jobs? 40 jobs? I didn't really know. It all came down to very simple mathematics, a fraction of workers would make the grade and eventually land a job. Other workers would be back on the street. Looking around the room I knew several guys who had been skipping from carrier to carrier over the years, like stepping on broken slabs of ice. They were doing it again, hopefully for the last time.

The word around the room was that Roadway Express was the focus, they were looking for workers. They were picking up more business. They weren't coy about admitting that they needed bodies. Positions were going to fill quickly. There were other targets to consider such as Yellow Freight, and Arkansas Best Freight. People

were asking about those companies, making inquiries, looking for business representatives. While seated, people were looking over the crowd at stations along the wall. A dash was getting ready to start.

The meeting broke and the room transitioned into a job fair, a free for all which asked that people be respectful but go wherever you please. The mob began to move, and it had that first dog-to-the-trough feel. I was reminded of going to dances in middle school, and how guys would scurry about when the last dance was announced, guys looking for that one girl. Today I just wasn't in the mood to compete with anybody, especially with a bunch of CF alums. A group of us walked over to the Roadway table where dozens of guys stood in front of us. So, we waited our turn. I could tell early that this was going to be a long day. But I was ready to stand for a while, all morning and afternoon if necessary. Guys in front of us were filling out forms and receiving paperwork, and the line was slowly moving. Our turn was coming, we just had to be patient.

A few guys were arriving behind us, not many, however. During this time, I surveyed the room. The center of the hall had emptied out. All the empty chairs made the room look like a donut. The socialites had stepped away from the middle, and the whole throng had moved towards the walls because it was time to get busy. We waited in that mix, and slowly inched our way up to the Roadway table. Guys were talking all around me, family style talk, very familiar and loose, the kind of talk that keeps nerves at bay. There were pressures here to be sure, but people handle pressure differently. Some guys don't care about pressure. Other guys respond to it with a working ease. And some guys don't handle it well at all.

Next, I saw a guy sitting by himself, right in the middle of the hall with nothing but empty chairs around him. He was a CF dock worker, part of the Tuesday through Saturday graveyard crew. I had worked alongside him for many years. And there he sat, a solitary soul, looking like an odd stationary piece far away from the moving puzzle of people. I didn't know him well, just a little. At work, he was a loner. He did his own thing on the job. But he wasn't a total hermit, sometimes after clocking out he

would walk out to the parking lot with somebody else. He had his small associations, but he was mostly a distant dude, not brooding, just far off. Even in the breakroom he had that aura. But he was just another face at work. I never had a problem with him. In fact, sometimes he would unexpectedly show up at a trailer that I was working on. He'd ask me about something odd, maybe a song he was thinking about, perhaps the title, the artist, or something of that nature. Socially he was different, but he seemed alright. Consolidated Freightways was filled with oddballs.

And there by himself, one of the oddballs sat. I studied him for a few moments, nothing more. There were pressing matters. Maybe it was time to be a little selfish, maybe it was time to man up. I did consider him while I was standing there, while we inched up. It didn't look like he had a plan of attack. Who could say what was on his mind? Maybe he had considered his chances and decided to throw in the towel. He might have been asking himself if he had the strength that might be required to start all over again, to be placed right on the bottom of a new seniority roster. After all, we at CF had lost everything, not just our pay, but our seniority, our medical benefits, our schedules, our vacations, our sick days, our holidays, our comfort zone, our associations, and even our friends. Getting a job at Consolidated Freightways might have been a big hurdle for this guy. Who knows? The guy was always a mystery to me. It wasn't unusual to see him spend some nights at work completely lost within his own thoughts. And there in the union hall he sat while the rest of us moved. With all the preoccupation and all the bustling about, I don't know if a single soul even knew he was there.

Somebody told me that he showed up at the terminal Labor Day night, ready to work, lunchbox in hand. Some security guards told him that the place was closed for business. He turned around, got in his truck, and drove away. Kind of sad, but he wasn't the only one. Another guy did the same thing that evening, a very different kind of guy, but a loner as well. These were two guys completely out of the phone mix, out of strong cliques, out of big or small social mixes. They were both peculiar, neither guy could get out of the way of their own personalities. For them, Labor Day was punctuated much differently.

For several of us, Labor Day began with early morning phone calls. In fact, the phone was ringing off the hook all day. People were networking, gathering, talking, and sharing stories. I was at a house where a few of us showed up early. And that front door opened and closed all morning and all afternoon long. The house was filled with dockworkers, drivers, and clerks. And of course, there was beer everywhere. Most of the guys were lit, a select few were completely hammered. But there weren't any judges here, it turned into a loud place where we could share information and get collectively dumb. It was just what we needed.

So, back at the union hall, as we waited our turn, the visual of this loner just sitting there could've been a painting. The picture of him seemed to make sense to me. He was in character as he continued to blankly look past us. If I had to guess, the day might have overwhelmed him.

We finally made our way to the table, filled out some paperwork, then returned to our seats waiting to be called for testing. Somebody within our mix said that Yellow also had a table but don't bother going over there. You had to drive to Tracy to get an application. A few others asked him what he was talking about. What was Yellow doing here if they didn't even have any applications available? The guy who had already visited the table reiterated, the Yellow representative had told him that he needed to drive to Tracy for an application. Somebody in the group uttered,

“What the fuck?”

Not that I questioned him, but it made no sense. Something compelled me to get up and go to the Yellow table. I thought to myself, “That's bullshit! That can't be right.”

As I closed the distance between myself and the Yellow representative, I could see him plainly. He was standing behind an empty table wearing a drab suit and polyester pants. He was lanky, kind of tall, and had a jaundiced look, an off-color hard smoker look. There he stood, looking like he didn't want to be there, not really a participant at all. The closer I got to the table the stranger he became. I finally arrived and met him

eye to eye. I got right to the point, no small talk here, not with this guy. I asked him plainly, “Do you have any applications?”

He responded “You have to drive to Tracy”

I thought . . . *okay, I’m not getting anywhere with this guy. . .*

Not verbatim, but I asked him something to this effect . . . *Do I walk in? Is there a place I need to go to? What should I do next?*

He mentioned something about a gate in the parking lot. There's a box with applications. And that was all the information he had about Yellow. At that point, I was done here. I walked away and returned to the group and sat down.

One of the guys gave me that I-told-you-so look. Then he asked me, “Well?”

Still a little dumb, I shook my head. A little smile came over his face and he turned his attention back to the group. We were going to do plenty of sitting, and I didn't feel like doing too much chit chatting today. I got lost in my thoughts for a while . . . “That whole scene at the Yellow table was beyond weird. What kind of company does that? And what about the strange stillness of that representative? What a solitary soul! Dude was just standing there aloof, versus the clamor at the next table where papers were flying, where clean managers were hustling, where workers were jostling for position, where it was serious business. What a juxtaposition! Here was this empty table with this eerily-still, half-dead looking guy behind it who was representing Yellow Freight, and just yards away was the Roadway Express table, the focus of the whole union hall, where guys in their embroidered navy and orange shirts were darting about, trying their best not to get overwhelmed by the crowd, trying to keep things in order, trying to keep bodies moving, trying to coordinate station to station. What was that all about?”

I thought to myself about each company, how they both made powerful first impressions on me. I also thought that there had to be some logic to the Yellow

presence here today. Maybe it was a test, maybe the company wanted to see if applicants had the fortitude to drive down to Tracy, meaning if they won't drive to Tracy to fill out a work application, then they probably won't have the resolve that it will take to work all the way out towards the edge of Stanislaus County. I've known a couple of dumb coaches in my time, guys who demanded weird things from their players that weren't really related to the sport. Maybe that's going on here? I also considered that maybe Yellow isn't really interested in picking up any workers here today. Could be. I didn't know a thing about their business plan. Maybe they weren't interested in securing CF business, or maybe they were already at capacity, maybe they had no interest in picking up any extra business, period. Maybe there was a moratorium on hiring CF workers. Going into the day, I didn't know much at all about Yellow. I just knew it was big and it was unionized. I came away with a very strange first impression of the company.

We continued to sit. But more names were getting called, guys were getting directed to side room areas for testing. We could also see the early birds funneling back out. Some guys were finishing up with some of it, and rumors were circulating about what to expect. Still, plenty of chatter in our group. One guy said he might drive to Tracy tomorrow and pick up some Yellow applications. Other workers told him they wanted one. Nobody knew if we had to mail them in or drop them in a box somewhere. But this guy was going to find out. The group would know soon enough. That would come later. Right now it was all about Roadway. It was right in front of us. Then as expected, a few names from our group were called. Guys stood up, collected their wits, and went away to be tested. People still waiting their turns were wishing them good luck.

A whole lot of good workers from Consolidated Freightways were left behind that day. After the tests, the waiting, the interviews, the discussions, the madness, and the farewells, I can sum it up only by saying that when Roadway called me for an orientation, I was fortunate, maybe a little blessed. It's hard to add up events and try to make sense of them when as participants we control so little, when too much of the

activity is beyond us even if the reward of a new little job might not be considered a reward at all. The truth is we were collectively on the run looking for landing spots. We had to keep off the street and stay economically viable, we had to keep the bills moving, we had to keep roofs over our heads, we had to keep marriages intact, and we had to stay on the grid. Those were just some of the factors that were at stake. And most of the people in the hall got left behind that day. Maybe eventually a good number of them were also fortunate. Maybe several of them found greener pastures. Most of them I lost track of because I had to pick up my work gear and move along with my nomadic tribe. We had to set up teepees inside the Roadway nation of strangers.

Within weeks a group of us had found a home, we were given hire dates and seniority numbers. Another journey began. At Roadway, Sacramento (809), the collection of workers from Consolidated Freightways were different from the Roadway crowd. They weren't better. And they weren't worse. They were just different, and it was obvious. For several months the Roadway people and the CF people studied one another. There was some friction, but not a lot. After about 6 months something interesting happened. The probation period had passed, the assessment period had passed, the dialogue about the value of CF people had shifted into a new gear. Roadway people noticed that the Consolidated Freightways infusion was a good shot in the arm. Many people agreed that the new blood had positively affected the terminal in West Sacramento. To Roadway's credit, the company acted quickly and responsibly when the iron was hot.

Each carrier had its own culture. I can testify to that fact. I've worked with a big sample size of guys from Consolidated Freightways, Roadway, and Yellow. I've also worked with residual amounts of workers from other distant carriers. All those cultures were markedly different. Anybody could argue about their effectiveness. Their cultures, however, were unique. This was especially evident with big dovetails, closures, and when large infusions of new bodies became business requirements. If a person at those companies didn't witness the collision of cultures, then they simply weren't paying attention. Tenured drivers and dock workers saw it first-hand. They had to work through it. Some of those absorptions didn't go smoothly, other times they did.

Each employee has the potential to last many years and work a long tenure. Each person is a big investment. One single person can pay big dividends. However, each person can also cut negatively into the bottom line. Their impact might not show on shift production. How they produce, no matter how it is measured, takes years to assess. There are subtle factors and obvious factors that go into the assessment stew. Attendance is a factor. Claims are a factor. Some guys have an innate tendency to damage items. It's often jokingly suggested that they simply can't help themselves, that destroying freight is in their nature. There are lost time injury factors. There are lawsuit factors. There are personal baggage factors. Some guys bring things to work which often go unnoticed, items that are best left behind, away from the workplace. There is also another big productive factor that every company must own since it is the company that does the hiring. Sad but true, some guys just aren't very good at the job.

This is just a raw assessment. Both Roadway and Yellow had their share of gems and lame ducks. Things were done differently to be sure, but in the end the job was the same. Trailers were to be loaded on an LTL basis. High and tight was the name of the game. And despite the amount of premium dock workers that occupied the Tracy seniority roster, Roadway had more. Both Roadway Sacramento and Yellow Tracy had comparable seniority rosters, these were two large facilities. But Roadway was sprinkled with more overall quality even before any osmosis of CF workers. This was very evident once the Roadway/Yellow dovetail was fashioned. Elements from both terminals would eventually be mashed together on the Tracy seniority roster.

The fact is Yellow was slower to grab available talent. Unlike Roadway, they didn't seem to be in any apparent hurry to get new employees in motion. Yellow did hire a group of CF workers who had later hire dates than the CF/Roadway group. Did those who were hired at Yellow try to get on at Roadway initially? I know that everyone I talked to at the hall was gunning for Roadway, if for no other reason to avoid a long commute to Tracy. Workers would do it only if the local options dried up. A few extra commute hours every day was not in anybody's plan. Getting from Sacramento to Tracy was no cakewalk, and everybody knew it.

In 2002 Yellow and Roadway were apart from one another. They were separate entities, and they acted differently. And today within a union hall some big decisions were made by each company. Roadway Express grabbed some prime cuts. Yellow Corporation was eventually left with available table scraps. The Roadway action led to a positive change at the Sacramento terminal. The CF presence was a benefit to the Roadway culture. Whereas Yellow's failure to act didn't lead to positive cultural change at the Tracy terminal. There were some individual strengths within the Consolidated Freightways workers who mixed into Yellow Tracy. I had worked closely with all of them for many years. And though Yellow picked up fewer bodies than Roadway did, both groups were collections of workers. So, here is my assessment of the CF fraction that Yellow hired: *They were just okay*. They were never going to move the needle. If someone were to assess them as collectively flat, I wouldn't argue. Remember, they were a collection of workers.

One company knocked it out of the ballpark, the other company struck out miserably. Roadway did its homework. Yellow didn't do its homework. An opportunity existed to make improvements to culture, and Yellow acted like a business laggard. A race had started. Roadway's position was correct whereas Yellow's position was incorrect. There really was no comparison to the CF bodies going into each carrier even if grading their value might appear to be highly subjective. The fact is, even though all of these bodies had come from one business, the Roadway group and the Yellow group were markedly different from one another. The Roadway group was of another work caliber.

Depending on what a person's perception of events was in 2002, I might have just made a few baseless claims. I'm certain of one thing, Yellow Corporation didn't do its due diligence as a responsible business especially with respect to building a strong culture. It opens the door to a host of new questions. Was this lax approach to hiring new employees just an anomalous event? And if it wasn't, then how long had it been going on?

### 3 | The Love Dog and the Peacock

Once upon a time in the hills of Gold Country there lived a Love Dog. As a puppy he had to learn how to run with bigger dogs. And run like the wind he could. He had to fix things and keep things tidy at an early age. He learned how to make meals, how to educate himself, and how to make friends. He was self-taught in many ways. But one day it was time for the Love Dog to grow up, so down from the hills of Loomis he came, searching for work under the big city lights. And though the big city could scare off many dogs, he feared not. The fact was the Love Dog could do a few things very well. He could load a trailer as well as any dog, at least any dog as far as the eye could see. Also, he could sniff out bullshit from a distance.

The Love Dog wasn't perfect, and he knew it. But he was good. He knew that too. He wasn't shy about telling other dogs around him about how good he was. Up on the slabs of cement where we ran, or at night while drinking coffee in the parking lot, or maybe in the confines of an empty trailer, sometimes the Love Dog would remind me of exactly how good he was. His rants could be epic, and he knew that I enjoyed hearing him boast. As it was my duty, sometimes I would have to remind the Love Dog that I was truly thankful to be in the presence of such greatness.

One morning something strange happened. A dock meeting was called for, a mandatory summoning of the crew, meaning outbound/inbound/city personnel plus a few hostlers, in all maybe 30 people. The barn had a manager who had come up from some other pasture, and now he was going to talk to the crew. So, all the forklifts pulled up to the meeting area, motors were turned off. A few goats pulled up to the apron, motors were shut down. The place became respectfully quiet. Once settled in, the manager began a one-sided discussion. He spoke with confidence. He was dapper, very clean. And now, he was presenting himself. He talked for a while, then he turned our attention to something he found, a piece of wood that he had encountered somewhere on the dock. He held it up for all of us to look at, it might have been a chunk of wood from a broken pallet, or maybe a crate had been clipped by a forklift. The piece was

about the size of a golf ball, and it was clearly visible in his hand. He reminded the crew that the piece should have made its way to the garbage can. Not only was this stray piece of wood in the wrong place, but it was a safety concern as well. He held it up for everyone to see and his discourse continued. There was a full whiff of arrogance with this guy.

The rest of his words weren't memorable at all. He had already made an impression on me, so I was already on shutdown mode with him and the people upstairs. I considered this whole thing just a work interruption. We all work in the dirt, we're all very familiar with it. Docks can get filthy. Workers soon realize that they can't pick up after everybody. Big docks can come with an assortment of abject slobs. Some workers keep their areas clean, others don't. If the company elects not to have janitors on the dock, then dock workers need to adjust. So, is maintenance important? Of course it is. Is it a priority? No.

During the meeting the Love Dog had been standing right next to me. I think I was daydreaming when he got my attention. He whispered, "Do you see it?"

I knew right away there was a layer to his question, so I started to scan the area. Everyone was loosely huddled up with some scattered forklifts parked around the meeting. Nothing unusual, nothing was catching my eye. I must have missed something. I knew how the Love Dog operated. There was something here, perhaps it was something right in front of me. Maybe this big shot had a piece of toilet paper trailing out of his pants, maybe one of the dock workers had fallen asleep, maybe someone was holding up a sign. Whatever it was, I wasn't catching it. The Love Dog had snared me so I finally conceded. I didn't have to say anything. Confused, I looked back at him with a 'what was I missing' expression. C'mon, help another dog out here. The Love Dog was wearing a wry smile. He told me

"Look right behind him."

I adjusted my focus. Directly behind the busy mouth was a strip trailer with swing doors pulled wide open. As I surveyed the scene the Love Dog asked,

“Now do you see it?”

Yes, I saw it. Directly behind the discussion sat a trailer which looked like someone had thrown a grenade inside of it, an absolute avalanche of freight, a dockworker’s nightmare. And superimposed upon it was this teacher of men who was more concerned about a little chunk of wood. And as the discourse continued the whole scene became more and more of an amazing shot. It was time captured. It truly was a presentation. The Love Dog had nailed down the moment and captured it with precision. It spoke volumes to where we were as a business. Before I was to give the Love Dog his props, I had to study the scene. I had to think about this thing a little bit.

I considered the stage backdrop, thoughts like “Look at that monster! Not a pup, but a van beast! Who’s the poor guy that will be asked to work it? How many dissatisfied customers are in that one? That’s going to be a long shift for someone. It’s the kind of trailer that nobody volunteers to work. It’s the kind of trailer that forklift drivers frown at as they cruise on by. It’s the kind of trailer that a dock foreman knows is a loser. If he opts to assign it on his shift, he knows his production will take a hit. Nobody is zipping through that thing. It may have been a decent looking load at the origin terminal, now it had shifted and become a disorganized mess of a stripper. Even the best forklift drivers in the terminal can’t save much from it, maybe a few pallets falling back, not much though.”

The two of us soaked it all in. The Love Dog stood completely still, like he was high on something. I looked at both participants, two different people coming from two different worlds. I looked at the Love Dog, studying his expression. Then I’d switch over to the little corporate mouth who continued his teaching lesson. Like a tennis match, I toggled my attention back and forth. And while the crew continued to gaze upon this guy who continued to hold up a little chunk of wood, the real maestro was standing right next to me. So, back and forth I kept my head toggling, exaggerating it a

bit. Finally, I got a chuckle out of the Love Dog. He gave me that look like he was getting ready to blush. And all I could quietly say was, “Wow, very well done.”

Here was this dock working professional standing next to me, a guy completely in tune with his work environment, a guy who wasn't saying much at all, a guy not participating in anything meaningful other than to communicate a lesson in his own private way. The Love Dog had pretty much seen it all. The fact was he was light years ahead of this other guy who had come out of his hole to conduct a lesson. This mouth had slowed down the entire operation just to present himself. This mouth was probably pulling down a nice salary. And he probably had the ears of other people who were in charge of this pirate ship. For me, it all made perfect sense. Lesson learned. Class dismissed.

And after the manager wrapped up his little presentation, the dock classroom was finally adjourned. The meeting broke up, the crew dispersed. Dock workers were mounting their forklifts and a few hostlers were disappearing into their goats. We stood there for a while before getting back after it. The Love Dog peered straight ahead, very still. I knew something was coming, something abrupt or something laced with humor. A curve ball might be coming so I waited for it. Besides, I like to be the last guy out of the room. And then he let me have it, just a tidbit to stew upon. The Love Dog muttered,

“What a peacock!”

The Love Dog turned away and returned to his trailer. And the peacock was long gone. He had already disappeared back into the offices where it was clean, safe, and warm. It was just another day. Maybe it had the reflections of a fable or a myth where there is a lesson to it all. Maybe the lesson was that the Love Dog was actually concerned with the paying customer while the peacock was concerned with a piece of wood, his teaching prowess, the power of his intellect, or his own vanity. Who knows? But there were lessons here, big business lessons to be sure, maybe things to think over

if we can be bothered by them at all. And for my own little private assessment, at this stage the company needed a serious overhaul if it wanted to succeed at the LTL game. I could see no meaningful connections, at least not towards the business of understanding LTL freight, which by the way was the business. Deep fixings were already in order to both culture and to the business of understanding LTL freight. The company might already be deeply retarded.

Back on the dock, it would still take a few minutes for things to get warmed back up, for guys to get buzzing around on forklifts, for hostlers to bump trailers, and for all the business-as-usual clamor to get back to speed. But I was curious. I wanted to investigate this ugly beast of a trailer. I walked over to the checker-stand by the trailer. I took the rubber band off the packet, looked at some of the bills, and took the load manifest out just to see who created this thing, how many bills were dumped into this monster, and what terminal was responsible for ejecting this turd into the system. It looked like it had come over the rail out of Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, the (120) terminal. I was looking for some Harrisburg freight, maybe it had come out of (135), but I found none so I had to assume that all of it came out of Stroudsburg, not that it really mattered. My investigation continued. This strip was going to burn a lot of hours and they'd probably sit on this thing all day. Junior guys would arrive in the evening, and some manager would probably save it for some unlucky fellow and completely ruin that worker's night . It would get done, however. Two guys might jump into it and knock it out, or at least make a dent into it until the trailer finally cleans up a bit. In any event, hours will be lost. Customers might be lost as well. But how much of a concern was that? I mean, if no one was acknowledging the problem, and at least acknowledging that we had a fundamental systematic problem, and that's what it really was, a problem of design systemwide, then how would it ever get remedied? By an onslaught of emails? By phone calls? By pictures that are hung in break rooms and hallways? By load quality assessments that point fingers at terminals? By people who are placed in charge but who are completely remiss? Who is responsible? Does it fall on anybody's desk? Or are the dockworkers here just collectively inadequate?

Let's start there, with that question. Are the dockworkers just collectively inadequate? And at that stage, at that time within the business (within one specific terminal), that question had a definitive and clear answer. The answer was No. At least within this large terminal, there was plenty of talent albeit in many of the wrong places. In other words, all sorts of talent existed, but too many players were out of position. In fact, the company was loaded with talent even if the pool of talent or the company itself was beginning to slip.

Strip and stack trailers add up. Dozens of trailers worked become hundreds of trailers. Hundreds of trailers worked become thousands of trailers. Thousands of trailers worked become tens of thousands of trailers. The trailers add up. The years add up. And the experience adds up. And with contractual workers, vertical and lateral movement within a company often is not a consideration. Dock workers, hostlers, and truck drivers do their time and go home satisfied with it. And for a fixed dock worker in a large terminal, his career can be viewed like a never-ending gauntlet of trailers to be stripped or stacked. However, with that kind of experience some workers realize that a trailer might communicate something, it might suggest things about a particular worker, or it might suggest things about a particular terminal. There were terminal patterns at this company. And many workers knew, especially workers who stripped on the inbound end, that some terminals were quite adept at creating labor-intense, hour burning horror events. The system had some bad acting terminals. The quality of their loads was substandard.

At this stage, and this was many years ago, the system indeed had a big problem. People that were working freight were privy to it. However, time didn't stand still. The years gathered and the company did not progress in achieving better load quality (real cube utilization), it just got worse. And before hyper-analyzing all the factors that might have contributed to the whole mess at Yellow/Roadway, let's just focus on the inability to produce consistent load quality.

Just to avoid any confusion, we must lump Roadway and Yellow together, even if they were exclusive many years ago. We could be looking into a timeframe around the time

of the merger. But it doesn't matter. Yellow wanted to acquire companies. So even if we are looking into a Roadway terminal, it's all Yellow. They chose companies to buy. And they chose to play this LTL game.

First, with respect to load quality, we must ask again whether the place was getting better or worse, and not shy away from the answer. It's a broad and highly subjective question, so generalized a question that simply by asking it, the question itself might lose value. But we must ask it and continue to peck at it until we get somewhere. Even if our answer is uncertain, that answer is good enough. Shifting into the present tense, we quietly admit that we have a load quality problem, big or small, that needs to be addressed. Remember, if we say that the problem is getting better, then we are lying to ourselves about it, or, we are completely unaware of where we are at. If we say it's just business as usual, then we have another problem, a systemic problem that we are stuck with because it's an impossible fix.

It's not in the nature of a foul culture to look in the mirror, admit that they are unable to solve the problem, then proceed to fire themselves. They would have to say something like . . . *We are indeed lousy. The only way to move forward as a business is to issue ourselves pink slips, clean out our desks, and get on down the road so that this company can finally improve.*

Again, it's impossible. A company will be dragged down before anything like that happens. Change won't happen with companies that are mired with people that can't fix problems. Those companies are effectively stuck. Unfortunately, all workers are stuck with those leaders as well.

We are pulled back to our original general question: With respect to load quality, was the place getting better or worse? And the question was entirely legitimate at that time. This was a long time ago! There was a big runway available. The company had ample time to adjust. It had ample time to improve. And talent was all over the place.

Is our problem coming into focus yet? Eventually in later chapters we will move far past system retardation, because a new model is not only required, but should be demanded by other existing companies that not only want to survive but want to offer the business community a safe and secure moving methodology that virtually guarantees better results. It will never be perfect so long as the human element is involved, but a model can be constructed, a model that moves products on an LTL basis more effectively. It will take a little bit of work, and a little bit of thinking. LTL companies should not only create dock designs that take poor loading behaviors out of the work equation, but the business community needs to put an end to LTL carriers that use designs which encourage workers to engage in behaviors that are perilous to achieving adequate cube. The mission should be to phase out all weak formats where poor loads are just part of the business-as-usual climate and offer the business community a model which in design and function is premier.

## 4 | Perils to Finding Real Cube

One early morning a few managers walked the dock inspecting a long line of strip trailers, corresponding bays, and everything in sight. They began handing out directives to get things in order. A big walk through was coming during daylight hours. They communicated that some big shots would be here with a prospective new client that might use Yellow to ship their products. So, the managers asked dock workers to move things around. Trailers were listed to be pulled out. A small platoon of janitors was called upon. Janitors I'd never even seen were stepping up, bustling about, emptying garbage cans. Brooms were suddenly everywhere sweeping large sections of cement. Forklift drivers were ordered to clean out bays and load all freight. Trailers were shut. Empties were called back. Trailers were swept out by dock workers. The sweeping continued everywhere, around poles, between trailers, and around the apron. One janitor was even busy dusting off the rack within the fuel area where propane tanks were stacked. All dust and cobwebs gone. The whole place was spic and span.

Then an old inbound dock worker who was getting close to his retirement spoke up. This man was normally quiet and reserved, a rough fellow who always just went about his business stripping trailers. He broke up the charade. He had seen enough. He shouted at these managers, "Oh, stop it! Just stop it!"

He relentlessly chided them, berating them like children. He tore into them hard, referring to their efforts as the old dog and pony show. He told them about how ridiculous the whole affair was, how making things shiny so we can secure more business wasn't an accurate reflection of anything. He pointed out several strips that had freight falling out of the back of them, damage was evident. He noted that some of the strips were pure crap, and that of course nobody wants to let the customer see those types of things. He told them that it was a good thing that the customers couldn't go back in time to see this shit. He pointed out that cleaning out the bays was dumb, and if

anyone upstairs at Yellow was worth a shit, they would know that. He told them if people here were really interested in making things move effectively, they wouldn't be interested in cleaning out bays. They would show the bays being utilized.

The managers weren't really equipped to deal with this old timer. It was obvious he didn't care about what they thought. He let everyone that was within earshot know exactly what he was thinking. He marched along with them for a while. He pointed his finger directly at a few more ugly strips that were on the pull-out list, items to get away from the dock before the big walk thru and sales pitch would arrive. The old timer continued to point. He shouted, "How can you sell this shit?"

Of course, in a few hours' time nobody would see it. The scenery would change. The dock would be a pleasant and beautiful place for any prospective customer to put their product, a very clean and welcoming stage indeed.

I remember thinking to myself, although the old timer's delivery was gruff and abrasive, he had a valid point. How can you sell this shit? He had nailed it with an exactness. He was correct. Yellow was in the business of selling service, more specifically selling service by pushing product through trailers, effectively or not. Yellow sold service. Somebody would get a sales pitch shortly. The dock would become an altered stage.

Maybe he got tired of the hypocrisy, of the sweeping dirt under a rug routine, of potentially giving customers a false impression of the business, and the absurdity of it all. But he had said something else, almost a passing remark, something that an ear could dismiss as more noise. He referred to the bays getting cleaned out, and the importance of the bays to a functional dock. They weren't spaces to clean out and just sweep over. They served an important function.

We need to consider our collective decision-making abilities, and how those decisions can be positive or negative with respect to loading outbound doors and achieving real cube. We might be required to put time on hold, especially if we don't have an adequate load plan reflective of the next few hours, as in what is here on hand,

or is in transit. We must always be willing to make modifications to cube (running/filling cube). Remember items are filling, more items are coming, but we must keep our abilities at choice high. But the clock is ticking. So how do we put time on hold?

Let's change our visual for a while. Consider the flat screen 2-dimensional game Tetris. Early versions of the game were ultra simple. For real gamers it was an easy game to master even if the pace became accelerated. In later versions, such as Tetris Worlds, the game came with a NEXT section and a HOLD box that contained room for one piece, a piece set aside to switch out whenever the player made a choice to do so. Single pieces would arrive in succession with a downward trajectory. The game requires players to decide on how to place each piece within the floor below, a floor that could either grow out of control with a series of poor decisions, or a floor that could clear out with a series of correct piece placement decisions. Each piece placed upon the floor fills an allotment of space. Bars that run horizontally must be filled with full squares. If a bar has one or more open squares within it, it will not clear out. There can be no gaps, no open spaces within each successive bar, bars that will continue to grow if full square is not achieved. When full square is achieved (elongated full bars), a section disappears. By doing this successfully, more space is available on the screen, the player has room to work and make decisions on how to maneuver falling pieces. Good decision making will ensure that the game continues.

If a piece is left unattended (meaning no decision is made on the part of the player on its direction or how it is to be maneuvered), the piece will continue its same trajectory and fall upon the floor taking up an allotment of space. Of course, no decision will result in a cataclysm. A succession of no decisions or any type of poor decision making will always amount to a quick building floor full of empty pockets. There is another level of decision making which I refer to as load mediocrity. It is a decision-making process that might keep the game moving for a while, but eventually mediocrity will amount to matters getting away from the player. The screen will soon fill with a mix of full and empty squares, bars pock marked with empty pockets are perilous because the floor will build up with successions of poorly placed pieces. Soon, there will be no room

left to maneuver falling pieces, working space has been choked out, and the game will end. Mediocrity is just what it suggests, it's just okay. It's mediocre.

Real players have options in this game. No matter how a piece is configured, whether it be a square, an elongated rectangle, or some other shape, it will arrive and settle eventually. An adequate decision is required on its downward path. There will be a critical point where players have only seconds to decide. Pieces may need to be turned and fitted accordingly unless the player is lucky, and pieces fall right into place. If a player is satisfied with their decision, and they are confident to make a quick determination on a falling piece, they can choose to accelerate the game. They temporarily go into another gear to get the piece fitted, then get back to the game, slowing down the pace of the game to make their next decision. More and more decisions will be made on piece trajectory no matter the style of the player. Real players have other options. They can continue to add pieces to the floor below, or they can put a piece on hold and switch it out with a different piece, a piece of a different configuration, a piece that has been set aside for a while, a piece that the player has determined is more appropriate to fill space on the floor below. They recognize the value of a particular piece. There will be a better time for it.

Our real focus is how to avoid pockets of open space on the floor below. The goal is constant, to continue to build adequate cube thereby clearing out space all game long. The fact that the clock is ticking is just a facet of the game. Proficient players confidently overcome the concern of time. They handle it. They are more than capable of keeping a real focus on maintaining square. They prove it by demonstrating skills at clearing out full bars, at avoiding ugly pockets of open space, and how to keep the game moving. They can also navigate through heavy conditions.

Let's note the few features that proficient players use to their advantage. The NEXT section allows players to see which pieces are coming. Players can visualize how the mix of coming pieces might fit into the floor below providing they are proficient enough to make quick decisions on pieces, and so long as they have visualization skills that allow them to put together a small load plan before events occur. A player that is not

only proficient but has mastered the game is far ahead of the player who just wings it piece by piece. They see more than just muscling in a single piece into the floor below. They see the NEXT feature and utilize it to their advantage especially if a succession of tricky pieces is soon coming. They plan. They know what to expect. They understand the HOLD feature, a box where a piece is set aside and put on hold status. A piece can sit there until the player chooses to switch it out, and to potentially use the piece in a more fitting manner. Why switch out a piece unless it will be a more appropriate fit thereby maintaining superior square? In effect, the player has a small bay to choose from, a HOLD box. Even if it is only designated for a single piece, the option exists.

In summary, the job of the player is to make good decisions on arriving pieces. Within an allotment of time, proficient players utilize different features of the game, thereby increasing the number of potential piece placement decisions. In effect, they have more choices to fit in pieces on a correct basis. They inherently know how to avoid any open spaces within each horizontal section of the floor below. Every piece that arrives, or will arrive in the Next box, is quickly considered. Falling pieces are adequately maneuvered regardless of configuration because every piece, tricky or not, has its own time. All pieces are correctly placed in tandem with one another. That's part of the puzzle building process. Thereby, full square is maintained. A full visual is also maintained. Players keep an eye on the Next and Hold boxes as well as their play screen. They always understand that a variety of pieces are coming. They make preemptive decisions and switch out pieces whenever necessary. They keep the screen clear of building bars that contain open gaps. They keep the game manageable. They are far beyond the activity of shoving in particular pieces because they have a range of options. Choice and square building ratios have changed. So long as a player doesn't become distracted, and falling pieces maintain a steady and realistic pace, the game can continue indefinitely so long as the player has the energy and continues to be interested. They've mastered the game.

For now, it's not necessary to add an axis, a 2 dimensional visual is adequate. Before we move fully into the idea of cube, let's consider our Hold box. This box holds a piece, maybe an odd configuration of a piece that we might be avoiding. It is a single choice

that eventually we must face. It can't stay there forever. At some point, we'll find a home for it even if we must build around it or build a section of floor specific to its shape, then fit it in once the right hole is dug. But for now, it might just sit in the Hold box. But what if we extend the length of our Hold box, and increase its area, stretching it out like a bay that can hold multiple pieces? How should we treat that new feature? How should we respect the value of its length?

Before we were limited to one piece per box. Now we have more space, and more potential pieces that can be added to that space and switched out whenever a decision prompts us to do so. With this feature, more options exist. Square or cube, it doesn't matter which, now is even easier to maintain and tackle, so long as nothing impedes the player. Square and cube can be built on near optimum levels even if we are still only on a single screen basis or a single door basis. The idea of a single player working on a multiple screen basis, like a chess master moving game to game, is an interesting concept. The idea of a single puzzle builder working within an area of multiple doors comes later.

Eventually the game of Tetris might accelerate, the pace might become ferocious. But let's not focus on that variable within a large LTL dock setting because it's not a real concern. A strong steady pace with good decision making in critical areas is all that's required. Consistent pace will always be needed, nothing more. We need a responsible freight flow, and a change of proficient puzzle building experience fixed within key areas. We need to encourage real teamwork within a real puzzle building framework. And within a healthy dock setting, we can eclipse the one option activity of the cross-dock puzzle building directive, where everyone is handed a strip and told to shove their piece into a running cube whenever possible. With the correct people in place, people who make better decisions at achieving adequate cube, no longer are we limited to existing in an environment of square building mediocrity. Better options exist because more puzzle building decisions are available within a given area per running load trailer. We just need enough real experience to make it work. We also must be bold enough to go there. If provided, a plan is suited for the model. The model is already rugged enough to take all comers so long as they fit within the parameters of

LTL. Experience overcomes the succession of varied pieces. Arriving pieces of different configurations are met and fitted on a responsible basis.

Model design remains a constant. It's both fixed and familiar. Its motions, whether basic or expanded, will do the same thing (with special consideration to the available talent at a terminal). If a terminal has a bunch of dock players who are just okay, then don't bother. If a terminal has a high turnover and is constantly placing new people on forklifts, then don't bother. But if a terminal comes with a handful of puzzle building work horses, everything changes. The company is in a new position. The question becomes: Can the company take full advantage of that working quality, or will it squander it?

Let's return to the bay and recognize it for what it really is, then we can really value it. The bay is a time-out. And when the time is correct, the bay gives us more pieces to look at and more options to consider as possible next up candidates depending on the status of a running cube, how the load is evolving or losing square integrity. If there's nothing in front of us physically that is indicative of putting together a superior load, freight that is deemed a better load option to maintain your square, then we hold. A superior puzzle builder knows things that other workers don't know, or they are willing to employ other load building activities that others are unwilling to either learn or engage in. The experienced dock worker, especially one that is focused on the load side of the operation, often knows what to expect. He has seen it time and time again, it affects his decision making abilities because he knows when it does arrive, especially if it indeed shows on a load report, it will change the load, it might also change his ability to make a superior load by allowing him better fill options that he is already considering in his mind before the freight (often a volume or something large or tricky) is stripped. He has already decided to hold items. In his own little way, he is predicting the future all the while considering how his load will come together before the freight even arrives. If there is nothing but little items to choose from, singles, small orders, little knick-knacks that need to stay out until the more adequate freight arrives, he knows that this freight needs to stay in the bay and out of the load door for now. That freight has a hold status especially if he is nowhere near filling a load door. He maintains his

square, he doesn't compromise his load, nor does he force anything in which is inappropriate to running a strong load. Nor does he allow anyone to enter to force their items in unless he okays it. But that is already baked into the work area and the model. Jobs are specific, there are no wastes of time, no decision-making overlaps, no conflicts of interest. Everyone has a duty. People who arrive at a load door already know this. Their decision-making process suddenly becomes very simple, very immediate. There is very little thinking on their part. It's very easy communication by both parties, especially for fixed crews who work with one another day after day, year after year. If a worker is unable to perform under those parameters, then they don't need to be working within the outbound operation. They can find something else to do on an inbound working or city working basis.

Reconsider where we are. We are one player amongst several, and within this whole moving mix of players coming and going, within a cross-dock directive, time is not our ally. Time will not stop for us. There are no timeouts. Nor are there any specific positions available to us that will allow us to take advantage of timeouts. The bay has been devalued because there is no one present to understand its value to the running load. The space has been compromised because nobody is in attendance. The balance between door and bay is skewed too heavily one way because the cross-dock directive is one of initial force, especially if it is hammered home by the management team. That repeated action on massive levels side steps the value of the bay, and it side steps the value of experienced puzzle builders that understand the value of that space. We are forced to admit that one fixed person of proficient puzzle building skill can load a trailer more effectively than the combined efforts of the cross-dock crowd.

First, a person fixed in a work area where their duty is completely recognized, is now in an advantageous position. With the placement of a skilled puzzle builder in a superior position, his decision-making processes will follow suit. He will make a higher number of appropriate puzzle building decisions, versus the crowd. The crowd isn't fully concerned about the whole cube, the whole rectangular prism which gradually fills. Besides, the crowd probably doesn't have (nor should they have) a single person within their mix that is on puzzle building par as that one fixed worker. Their concern

is collectively myopic. They are ultimately concerned with their specific shipment, to get it in, then return to task. In a fixed model, those who arrive with shipments don't have to worry about making an adequate decision. They don't have to spend time thinking about puzzle making decisions, especially decisions that must always consider maintaining an adequate running cube. With respect to building 3 dimensional puzzles within 27-foot-long rectangular prisms, if the directive assumes that every dock worker is on par with one another, and that multiple independent players can through their collective efforts stack a trailer as effectively as one experienced puzzle builder, then the results should be predictable. The results will be weak.

We return to the bay once more, an area which allows us to make better choices, to have more opportunities at filling adequate running cube, especially if that person doing the choosing has achieved a level of proficiency, even mastery. Someone that operates on a high puzzle building level can cover more and more areas, such as additional adjacent doors all the while spotting bays, checking new arrivals, while always considering a load plan if provided. The actual number of doors would be at the discretion of real engineers, so long as those engineers understand the value(s) of maintaining fixed puzzle builders within an operation, keeping respectful watch to factors such as avoiding burnout, keeping workloads realistic, and understanding the value of acceleration specific to position within one part of the operation.

Anyone can wipe out a bay and throw freight into a trailer. But there are workers who quite simply make better decisions, and they do that action at a strong clip. Given enough choices, they create finer one-and-done-loads. Subjective grade or not, cube is cube. There is an artistry about the effort, there are certainly style points. But in the end, adequate cube is easy to identify. It's a no bullshit endeavor. After several years working around the same people, with respect to maintaining adequate cube, the big dogs become evident. Unless completely oblivious to their surroundings, coworkers get to know who-is-who. For those workers who do clue into their work environments, at some point they quietly admit that not everyone's the same. Dock workers are especially different from one another.

Some people are exceptional at some items, other people have no feel for it whatsoever. At some point in the business, we must come to grips with the fact that some people have no apparent knack at building puzzles. Maybe it's just not their thing. Maybe it's not in their freight DNA. The same could be said about driving a truck. Some can do it, others can't. Some get out there and practice and soon realize that it might be beyond their abilities. Working the dolly is not for them. Finding and grinding a gear is not for them. Being sedentary for long hours might not be for them. They realize that driving a truck might not be for them. A light bulb might go off in their head, *maybe I'm out of my depth*.

Puzzle building is also a far reach, slow-learned or inherent, you either have it or you don't. You eventually possess the skill, or you don't. A person who consistently makes poor decisions on the stack side of the operation, it's safe to say that they simply don't have it. And within a large consolidation center where decision making can unfold into wide ranging sample sizes, door after door, day after day, year after year, it soon becomes obvious who can do it and who can't. There are people, even senior workers, who simply don't have it. They never jumped upon the stack side puzzle building learning curve. In a cross-dock model where everyone moves independently, their lack of skill on the stack side can be detrimental, even disastrous if left unchecked for long periods of time. But lack of puzzle building ability isn't detrimental within more functional models. As bad as it sounds, being a poor puzzle builder is okay within a premier model where positions and tasks differ. There is plenty of room aboard for people of different skill levels even if some of them are slow to get on a puzzle building learning curve. And if after several years, they still don't get it, that's still okay. The model allows room for them to operate without them posing a continuous risk to achieving adequate running cube. The model is safe from their lack of puzzle making abilities. So long as they can operate at a safe clip, and so long as they don't damage disproportionate amounts of shipments, they can be positive contributors. But to reiterate, the fact that everyone is different isn't detrimental to achieving cube within a premier model. We admit that all workers are different. Now we can more effectively choose who is who, and who should be where. Despite all the activity within the model (what everybody else is doing), the puzzle building activity which creates adequate and

safe riding cube is the crux of the operation. We drive this point home hard, and we don't ever shy away from it.

A fixed model takes full advantage of the power of one experienced puzzle builder's ability. The company doesn't hesitate in admitting that not all workers are the same. Each worker comes with a different skill set, a different strength, and with different weaknesses. The model and the workforce are adjusted to fit one another. Certain types of workers need to be fixed within certain types of areas. And they remain fixed until natural and normal factors come into play.

Within a fixed model only a few different start times are the order. Everyone goes to break at the same time, everyone goes to lunch at the same time. And because of its inherent interdependent nature, the whole model moves as whole bodies of workers move, as one collection of interdependent working parts. Jobs are specific and unique. All positioning is advantageous. Everyone on the outbound is interdependent, the puzzle building motions are correct, therefore the model is fixed. It doesn't require change.

Opposed to the fixed model is the flexible model, an antiquated item where everyone on the outbound performs independently, where puzzle building motions are collectively incorrect. This type of model by design always remains in a state of disorder and flux. Therefore, flexibility is required. Within a flexible LTL model, workers are placed in disadvantageous positions. Their positions are collectively the same. Each player runs the same rat race through the maze, gets to destination, adds his piece, then scurries back empty to his trailer to start the entire process all over again, the process of adding more and more pieces to existing poor running cube. In a flexible model, everyone has the same job. They are not specific. They are not unique. What everybody is doing is easy to look at, a computer screen that appears to tell the whole story of performance and production. People are charged and paid to look upon those numbers, that activity. More jobs are required, new jobs are created, a nation of inexperienced decision makers are put into motion, a massive expense which is nothing more than wasteful overhead. Bodies are required to fix matters. People of working

inexperience are set in motion to oversee the model, to make sense of the existing moving mess, to pull and tug on matters, to make decisions that will make things presentable.

But what is really happening? The operation has been watered down; stronger workers have been stymied. The collection of those working directives, those behaviors, those motions, and that style of work, requires flexibility. A rash of decisions emerge. Remedies and medicines are required to fix poor looking puzzles, poor looking puzzles that might be sent. Poor looking puzzles might require more and more handlings to reconfigure. Managers have quite a lot of job security in this environment. The company has elected to pay people to maintain a defunct model, an action that can and should be interpreted as worse than charity. At least charity has a positive function.

Within a flexible model, there is a rash of different start times, start times that are subject to change. There is overlap everywhere, people are coming and going all over the place, stepping in and out of the operation at an assortment of different times and locations. Bids are constantly being created, canceled, abolished, and reposted. Doors are never properly set. Change is everywhere. Workers are unfamiliar with their work areas even if they are tenured. Managers need flexibility to make more and more decisions of change. They are in constant motion to fix broken items, to adjust the operation, to turn things on, and to turn things off. Matters are controlled, matters are micromanaged. Traditional sets of managers are charged to keep the operation running. The need to be flexible communicates this:

*We must be flexible, because as a puzzle building business we have absolutely no idea what we're doing.*

The fixed model has stepped over all those types of behaviors. It has avoided them by design. It has remedied itself before even getting started and has moved far beyond business nonsense. It has purged itself of all decision makers who place inexperienced communities in front of experienced communities. It has also purged itself of all decision makers who create and/or reinforce false directives. It ensures that a

functional dock design takes advantage of the different abilities of its available workforce. And with the correct people fixed in place, a new understanding of the power of the bay comes into focus. Within a functional LTL dock operation, it is every bit as important as the load door because both areas depend on one another. Puzzle building experience understands this relationship. Experience forces nothing until real cube is considered, filled, and appreciated.

At post roll-out Tracy, there was no real outbound appreciation of the bay. Proof being, Yellow didn't take advantage of the bay's value as a timeout portal, a place to put pieces on hold so workers could furthermore build better loads. Nor did the terminal value the puzzle building experience that was readily available. Real and functional operations take advantage of its working experience, especially in high impact areas. They don't choose to sideline and minimize their impact. They find ways to keep them engaged. Instead, Yellow 813 elected to go elsewhere. They chose to ride inexperience, and they chose to stress the cross-dock directive which by action devalued the power of the bay. And what happened? Outbound loads were suddenly spun out of control on gross levels. Impactful decisions by impactful players were also grossly minimized. In the end, outbound cube suffered.

## 5 | A Premier Model

Working the dock at a large LTL trucking facility can be very mundane work, plain and simple, no other way to describe it. Much of the activity isn't mentally challenging. Workers follow directions. They follow computer prompts. They follow work rules. The dull simplicity of the job can bother workers if they stew over it long enough. I refused to let it bother me because it wasn't worth mulling over. I was content even if I was an ordinary dockworker, nothing more than a working dog right beside many other working dogs. I had found my spot.

Workers find ways to preoccupy their minds, some guys fill their ears with little devices and tune out the work clamor. I've been working freight for a long time; cell phones were not always the case. At Consolidated Freightways guys were acutely aware of their work environment. But while working at Roadway the phone revolution did gain momentum. I chose not to tune in to another device all night long. The phone stayed in my pocket, within a cup holder on a forklift, upon a checker stand, or within my lunchbox. I deemed it a distraction, a virtual safety hazard. I trusted myself and myself only. On a big dock it's hard to anticipate what everyone will do while all forklifts are in motion, because in the end, you don't really know. As a rule, I wanted to hear them coming. I didn't like the idea of taking one of my senses and tossing it away hour by hour, within a place that was inherently dangerous. So, from beginning to end with few exceptions, I remained tuned into my work environment, eyes and ears open to the moving parts around me.

I was fine with the night after night simplicity of emptying out trailers, of loading trailers, of identifying bill after bill, of handling shipment after shipment, of seeing the same accounts repeatedly, of seeing the same faces. I'd anticipate going to breaks and lunch so I could make some coffee, read a magazine, maybe play dominoes, play cards, or do crossword puzzles. Those activities helped me rest and stay adequately focused

while on the dock. I'd return to work recharged and continue my work duties which were usually outbound specific. The work area was filled with plenty of boring space. It wasn't much of a challenge, and it also became something of a blur. Seasons would pass quickly.

Then something began to gnaw on me. I could see waste in some critical areas, lost opportunities, poor motions, and weak work designs that with some simple adjustments could be remedied. It's one thing to complain about all the poor working nuances of a place, it's quite another to pinpoint them, then offer a remedy. Indeed, I was bored. So, I decided to start taking notes and jotting down ideas with some of the obvious items that I thought were big losers. Just simple notes, scraps of paper that I began to collect night after night. This activity was just something to do, it was never some big endeavor to fix the operation. But I was curious. This LTL outfit was an old company. I kept meditating . . . . . *you'd think they would have figured out some of this by now.*

Like the previous carrier which I had a deep appreciation for, there were some clear strengths here. Some items were visibly stronger, and some were weaker. This place was like a weird coin, it could be frugal on one side, and wasteful on the other. And right when it appeared they might solve a problem which was right in front of them, they'd step over it like it wasn't even there. But to their credit, they did flirt with items. In other words, they could get close to solving problems, they might even talk about it, but in the end they couldn't do the real work. Nor could they see themselves. And what was dangerous to the future of the place, they couldn't be told anything, because the culture was convinced that they already knew it. But that's a tough sell, because it was obvious that they weren't doing their homework. The operation had flaws and stagnation all over the place. Therefore, there was nothing progressive about the thinking here.

Time passed. I continued to ask myself some simple questions. Where was efficiency lost? Where was cube lost? How was it lost? Was there a motion (something I could easily identify) that imperiled cube? Where was travel time lost? Were there weak directives which led to poor working performance? In other words, were the

directives leading to waste? And were these directives caustic (even detrimental) to other operations within other terminals? The why of that type of question was not a consideration. I was just curious about the motion(s), nothing more, especially if the motion(s) could be identified as erroneous. There was plenty of cause and effect in this place, there were also plenty of directives. Why move one way when you could move another way, especially if the other way is more efficient, and/or will result in a higher cube grade? The questions could get away from me especially if they drifted into areas of why. So, I kept them simple. And in many respects, I didn't even know what I was doing, but it kept my mind busy, and I was comfortable with my approach. I worked at my own pace with my own style knowing full well that time was on my side. I could walk away from the endeavor whenever I chose. If I wasn't feeling it, then I'd leave it alone for a while. But even if I did take a week off, I'd circle back to it somehow, usually picking up where I left off.

I had an immense lab to work within, I could travel freely and go about my investigation any way I chose. There were no rules, no deadlines to commit to, and no exams to take. I could continue to ask questions and take notes within a no pressure environment. So, I continued to build information and find new questions.

I was not an engineer, and I knew it. But I wasn't blind, I did have a few strengths. I knew how to ask questions, I knew how to solve basic puzzles, I knew how to stay organized, I knew how to retain information, and I knew how to revisit problem areas that jammed me up, areas where a breakthrough in thinking might be required. I also took two classes in high school that were integral to my investigation. Right away I could see their value. The first course was Drafting which I took as an elective. It taught me how to legibly print, how to make basic diagrams, how to represent space on a flat piece of paper, and how to appreciate and care for the small tools that were in front of me. The second course was Geometry. It was part of the mathematics curriculum. And even though math didn't interest me, I liked Geometry. Maybe it was trying to understand angles, maybe it was the chapters that covered different shapes, or maybe it was the measurement of space. I'm not sure what it was about Geometry, but I didn't reject the subject. And now, some of those lessons had value.

Some days I'd keep a clipboard or manila folder on my forklift. I always kept a few pens with me and paper was everywhere. I used the blank sides of waybills, load manifests, copies of shipping orders, and old bills of lading. Also, each door had a checker stand next to it, a place where people could not only slot their loaded or docked waybills, but a place that had a small flat metal area atop it with a slight slant, like a miniature drafting table, but big enough to work unobstructed if needed. I could park my forklift in front of a trailer and safely work even if for a minute or two. If I felt the need to do some sort of dictation, or if something internal prompted me to make a note of an idea, I could stop what I was doing and immediately resume my investigation. Nobody knew what I was doing. To the people around me, it might look like I was filling out a load manifest for a load door or filling out some hazardous material shipment information. There was nothing to draw anyone's suspicion to what I was doing. It all looked like just normal dock working activity. I might spend time gathering ideas and taking down notes, usually within the outbound operation, and could do so effectively on an uninterrupted basis. Often, I was drawing nothing but blanks, and I would go home empty. But some nights were special. I was capturing working ideas and capturing working areas and transferring them to whatever paper I could find. Much of the material appeared as incomplete ideas, incoherent rambles.

Within a few months, I had built a pile of notes. I kept everything. I considered it an ugly morass of information. But over time, I changed my perspective a little. I just needed to keep moving straight ahead and gather more and more each night that I was feeling it. There were plenty of long pauses, but time wasn't an obstruction. So, I didn't fret over a mess of folders because there was no penalty if the information sat. I knew that some of the stuff, even if awkward and sloppy looking, had value. More months passed.

I can't accurately say exactly when and where the model appeared. It was much more than some consideration, much more than some imaginary form of ineffable beauty. Even though initially faint, I pulled it together somehow and had it firmly visualized. I could quickly see the value of its fluid dynamic, of its perfect symmetry. I could also see the value of position, the value of decreased travel times, the value of

fullness versus emptiness within it, not just with what was merely traveling on a set of blades, but also a different fullness as in the ability to stay working towards a new cube capacity where there was no compromise, all the while keeping crews working on optimum levels. So long as the company had enough talent on hand, it was maximum efficiency. For a large outbound crew that has access to large tonnage going from a number of strip doors to an array of carefully placed stack doors, it wasn't possible to cut it any closer. Each handling was geared for success, success at achieving high productivity while maintaining success at achieving new levels of cube appreciation, even if the clock was ticking, even if the customer wanted their goods on an expedited basis. The gate to gate on this model couldn't be better so long as puzzle builders and hostlers remained unencumbered. I had captured it. I just needed to effectively communicate it.

It evolved further, and then it was done. The whole work was too extensive, too much peripheral flux, overkill, a little repetitive. So, I sharpened it down to about 35 pages. At this stage, the model was burned into my brain. I was confident that with a white board, a black dry erase marker, and about 15 minutes of uninterrupted time, I could easily explain it in its entirety. I dwelled on it however, thinking perhaps it needed something else.

One day a manager appeared on the dock. He called for everyone to gather up so he could talk to the crew. This guy oversaw the place. He wanted to let the people know that he was open to all suggestions. He believed in an open-door policy. He assured the dockworkers and drivers in attendance that he was always available to discuss concerns. And then he departed. I considered his words. I also considered that maybe it was time to share my ideas. Maybe he could do something about some of the terminal's problems. After all, he should be able to fix things. He was the final word on this place. Maybe I'd give him a try.

The next day I brought my materials with me just in case he was around. And, early in the day I saw him just outside the dock office. I walked over and I introduced myself. I told him that I had some ideas about making some improvements to the dock, and

how we could become more efficient as a terminal, especially on the outbound. I told him it wouldn't take long for me to explain it. I finally asked him when he would be available. He then told me that today was a busy day and that he had a lot planned. And then he stopped talking. We met eyes for a second, then the conversation ended. Nothing else. For myself, the message was clear . . . . . I was completely wasting his time. Like an opposed magnet I reacted. I did an about face and sternly walked away from him, putting as much distance I could between the two of us. I headed towards the edge of the dock several yards away. When I arrived, he was already out of sight. He had disappeared back into the main office.

At the edge of the dock, I reflected for a while. I had just gotten the door slammed in my face, which really was okay. I was tough at this point, little items like that didn't bother me. After coming out of Consolidated Freightways I was hard, but not combative. But my about-face reaction was odd. There were no departing words, nothing. Instead of being drawn into the moment and calling this person out for saying some bullshit the day before, something pulled me out of there. Maybe it was my gut or my intuition. Maybe it was my will. I don't really know, but something grabbed me hard before I could normally react. I had grown up at CF, and I knew myself very well. I knew exactly how I reacted to people who contradict themselves. I wouldn't hesitate to call anybody out. Instead, I had acted out of character and just walked away. The experience was nothing short of bizarre.

I considered this aging company and my position within it. I might be completely wasting my time here. The guy who was in charge had just broken his word and did so within 24 hours. His open-door policy and his being open to suggestions were pure bullshit. There wasn't even a hint of . . . Maybe we can talk about this later. But what was I expecting? The fact was, I really didn't know much about this place. I did know that there were big cultural problems here and a lot of things were far from correct. It might even be rotten inside.

My little misadventure at dabbling with the operation and finding new ways to fix it was one thing. But for some big shot to blatantly break his word was quite another. It

was enough for me. If this company was going to promote those types of individuals, then I would steer clear of that community of people. The company had lost me right there.

So, on that day I decided to swear by it. I forget the exact words, but I did take an oath. The substance of it was simple. From that day forward, I wasn't ever going to offer up anything of operational value. I would slip back into the ordinary. My level of participation would be very low, and very professional. Dealing with dock foremen and lower tier managers wouldn't be a problem. But making any suggestions to improve operations? Forget it. Fixing design flaws or communicating anything of operational value ended right at that moment. It wasn't my job, nor was my duty. I would socialize on a very low level, preferably with people I didn't have to worry about, with people whose word was solid. And that's where I would stand the rest of the way no matter what events played out.

When Yellow sank, I went down with the ship. I was comfortable with my station. I knew for a fact that I did my very small part in order to keep the business afloat. I kept clear of those who engineered the Yellow disaster while staying true to my word.

Whether it was Roadway, or YRC, or Yellow, or whatever else they wanted to call this damned company, I kept everything I learned very private and very close to the vest. I didn't have a choice. One day many years ago, I swore to keep my distance. I also swore to leave the foolish part of myself far behind.

## 6 | Motion and Error

A hostler blew a fuse one morning. After parking his goat, he came down to the main break room and went on a rant about how there was no way this company could stay in business by sending these trailers down the road. He was ready to argue full tilt if anybody was willing to speak up. This whole thing was beyond concerning and it all came down to serious business. He began making points, talking about cube, revenue, what we were sealing, and what we were dispatching out. Too much of these trailers weren't even worth our time. They were losers. He told those in attendance that Yellow was walking straight into disaster and it was time to wake up and open our eyes. His final message was loud and clear

*“We’re not going to make it by doing this shit!”*

But he was only one worker, one voice in a place that had become strangely quiet. Still, anybody who had any firm grasp of the place knew that the terminal was sputtering. We were suddenly looking backwards like it was amateur hour. Far too much of the collective workings in Tracy were counterproductive (even detrimental) to what we should be doing as a responsible LTL carrier.

There are always inbound cuts to consider, balancing trailer pools, and operational needs that might compromise cube, but the hostler made valid points. Too much suspicious activity was happening that went against the LTL grain, because every time the company acted thus, it was like throwing money down the drain. Whatever the new plan was, it made no LTL sense. Roll out absurdities were taking a toll, on both people and freight. Despite the passive nature of the place, a selection of tenured workers in Tracy were on high alert.

With a few changes of directives, the outbound loads coming out of Tracy were not even close to being up to previous standards. Collective dock activity amounted to subpar configurations bound for other terminals. The efforts of many senior workers had changed as well, because the design had changed. It was cause and effect. Seasoned outbound performers were blending into the operation. They were getting handed strips. And they were no longer in positions to monitor loads going out. Reddaway workers were also part of the new whole mix. There were also brand-new dock workers which were being added to the bottom of the seniority roster. They needed more time and plenty of patience to bring along. And of course, the utility driver process was in high gear. All together, these had severe transformative properties. These were big homegrown hurdles that the company placed in front of the tenured workforce. So, when the travelers arrived in waves to help clean up matters and get the terminal current, many of Tracy's strongest workers had seen enough. They refused to participate within the dock charade of fighting over forklifts, of adding their shipments to poor running loads, and of doing back strips and reworks of poor puzzle creations. Tracy dock workers still did their job. They still emptied out their strip assignments and took responsibility for their freight, but in their estimation, it wasn't the job of senior men to clean up after everyone else. The machinery was too large. Meanwhile, cross dock directives continued to be stressed, directives that hammered home the idea of loading all your freight and doing what you can to avoid the bays. With more mixes of new employees, some of whom had no concept of outbound specifics, and more and more utility drivers arriving in the evenings, inexperience in motion was essentially dropped right in the middle of the main operation. With respect to outbound load doors, this type of inexperience was ultimately detrimental to running cube. The big roll-out was in full gear. Yellow was committed to it. The place was out of hand.

Some people were actually concerned because the by-products of the new Yellow design were ugly. Tracy was a big terminal, and it had not only degraded in the area of achieving cube, but the terminal was in shambles. With the absorption of Reddaway, with dropping utility drivers directly into the working dock mix, with the gross distortions to outbound load zones, with the carousel of changing doors, with changing

bids, with changing start times, and with more and more fresh managers getting cycled in, the place had become a dysfunctional unorganized mess. But the real magic of the new roll out were the gross alterations to cube on massive levels. If done with an efficient correctness, maintaining real cube is that special thing which allows an LTL carrier to be able to operate on a positive basis. Regardless of how other people were grading loads coming out of Tracy, reworks became too common an activity. That tells a story. Reworks should be uncommon, even rare events. But fixing bad loads became part of the job for some workers. It was business as usual.

None of the real factors that could lead to positive success were addressed. Were we in the LTL business or not? If we were, then we had better start paying respect to cube, and we better start by sending full/correctly loaded trailers down the road. This wasn't Swift. It wasn't J.B. Hunt. And it wasn't Marten. Those carriers are basic in design, and their approach to cube is different. Yellow was an old LTL giant that was in a completely different trucking game, its approach was not just an in-and-out process of flooring out trailers and getting shipments down the road. Available space per trailer carried a different stackable and vertical value.

Within the LTL arena, cube is the name of the game. Every seasoned dock worker who can load on an effective basis (those experienced individuals who do the work and who really know their stuff), understands a few basic principles that go into building a fine running load. There are many ways to load a trailer, but for many proficient dockworkers, rule #1 is *Maintain your square*.

That's the term most often used. It's an ultra-simple term, since as dock workers we're not actually talking about square, we're really talking about maintaining cube, working freight in and up (if secured and safely possible), all the while respecting the cube of the building load. Seasoned loaders have a built-in understanding that other workers are coming. Other freight will soon be added. So, keep your square running and don't add a bunch of junk to a running load which will force more and more adjustments. Keep the volumes filling, use the little stuff in wise ways, or hold them. Add them when the time is right. *Maintain your square* is a term that suggests proper

stack behavior. It automatically communicates to senior dock workers:

*Don't add a bunch of shit to a load trailer and force a rework. Make good decisions to keep the load high and tight. If you can't do that, leave your freight in the bay.*

Some operations are hybrids. They aren't perfect, but if they contain enough experience and have adequate crews that can monitor loads on an effective basis, they work. Some emphasize more of a hands-on stack style where a senior dock worker monitors certain areas. People are doing other things. Hybrids on the outbound focus on keeping strip trailers moving while keeping load doors filling. Workers do what they can to ensure that loads maintain their cube. Some workers might cruise load zones so that the dock doesn't get out of hand, so that problems don't get compounded, and that loads don't become disastrous. Seasoned workers who really know their environment still might elect to strip and do so deep into their shift, but they can shift quickly to the other side of the operation when required, or when troubleshooting is necessary. They also know who is coming and going.

However, in the final analysis, a hybrid can still get out of control. It is still susceptible to poor running loads. Even if senior men can keep it effectively moving, too many factors can negatively affect it. But with the rollout in Tracy, and the absence of too much experience on the stack side, it didn't take a leap of the imagination to know what was happening to the loads. What was once a somewhat effective outbound hybrid model in Tracy, was transformed into a cross-dock beast where responsible control was lost on the stack side. Maintaining square, or better described, keeping cube on a responsible basis was ultimately compromised. The whole collision of absorbing Reddaway, adding utility drivers to the mix, and changing the whole structure of the dock, completely morphed the Tracy dock. Load quality was morphed as well. It was an ugly transformation which tore the operation apart. Too many senior dock workers who were stack oriented, men who for years took the time to look at load plans, and men who often took the time to responsibly monitor loads, began to disappear into the cross-dock operation. Poor running loads followed suit.

There's an old saying, *Cube is Revenue*. In the LTL sector cube can be viewed as revenue. Each trailer that travels down the road has an allotment of space, some space is full, some is empty.

Full cube = Revenue gained. Empty cube = Revenue lost.

Cube is potential energy. The goal is to fill up as much space with revenue generating shipments, shipments which are the life blood of the business. Filling cube must outpace all other costs. Cube (potential revenue) must surpass the rest of the field. People can look at operating ratios all they want and make sense of the business that way if it brings comfort to them. A trucking operating ratio might have value, it could be used as a meaningful measure if the company acted on a responsible basis of maintaining cube. Unfortunately, with all due respect to cube, Yellow wasn't a healthy business. Therefore, how is there value in a measure such as an operating ratio when the company can't do that most basic thing that it should be designed to do as a business? There is no value in it. It is a meaningless measure. If Yellow was healthy, it would have value. Instead, Yellow was sick. If what you are doing as a business (providing service by creating puzzles and taking those puzzles apart in coordination with pushing all puzzle pieces from one trailer into another trailer within the heart of the system) is fundamentally incorrect, then why measure it? The whole thing was like opening your own veins, then justifying your actions somehow. The company was deep in the process of breaking down the whole operation. Nobody had the guts to discuss it.

Everyone understands that we live in an age of cameras, stringent security, and surveillance. Many people feel that some of these items are dangerous and obtrusive. But the eye overhead could have a very meaningful function within a functional model, something much more meaningful than looking at theft or downtime. Within a fixed LTL model, the mission is to keep all motions correct, to keep the dynamic up to working speed, to keep it started and shut down in a coordinated and predictable fashion. The main purpose of the eye overhead is to ensure that functional models move unhindered, without compromise. Because of the model's form, and because it is filled with experienced adults (and nothing more), the model supervises itself simply by its design, with an extremely special regard to who is where, especially on the edges. In

the center where most of the action originates, some things aren't really considerations, there isn't time because the dynamic outpaces some traditional concerns. Of course there will always be the need for security, but many things can be avoided once a company makes a serious decision and serious commitment to hire adults, keep high impact individuals in key areas, keep them fixed, keep inexperience away from them, and finally allow them to do their jobs. In effect, these dock operations should be lean monsters with only performers in attendance.

Companies don't need any more attachments. On-site supervision loses its traditional value within a functional model. Experience as a supervisor, without real LTL work experience, means nothing within a healthy model, especially a premier model that runs on an optimum level. You either have experience building loads, or you don't. You either have experience stripping trailers, or you don't. You either have experience driving a truck or you don't. There is nothing to argue about. The concern of those behind the lens will always be in the small details, things required to protect the business, but operationally the only thing that supervision needs is to ensure that the model continues to move and function as it was designed, with a smooth precision, and with an uninterrupted hostler freight flow, and to ensure that both dock and yard aren't compromised.

After everything is considered, we can't forget where we are. We are on a plane. We are looking at a rectangular slab of cement, of flat working space. Our goal is to build adequate puzzles on a 3-dimensional basis within trailers that surround the perimeter of that flat working space, a space that like a never-ending racetrack will contain an assortment of working motions, full or empty, perhaps without end. Some spaces gradually fill, other spaces gradually empty. And through that space runs a fluid dynamic that is constant so long as all positions are correctly filled. We are talking about living bodies that must make decisions that are of value. Every person's decision must add value to the operation no matter what their role. People in this model are doing different things while pace is maintained, that's why it works.

To achieve success and strong metrics across the board, the focus and effort shifts to

achieving one pure collective motion; the goal is to eliminate the need of looking at individual measure and then try to derive meaning from it, unless stack quality and the time it takes to achieve that quality becomes problematic, then a new body might be required. One of the goals in the model is to achieve superb puzzles of cube without burning anybody out. Always keep in mind, a healthy outbound dock operation continues night after night, year after year. Once an operation has identified someone as skilled in an area, the goal is to keep that person of value in a position of value. By doing so, that experienced person adds value to the operation and the company, an LTL company that is in the business of making puzzles that are not only adequate but puzzles that are one-and-done. They are safer cubes, where claims are less likely, where the next inbound work assignment at the next terminal becomes cleaner, more organized, and more friendly. The system is thereby positively affected.

Instead, Yellow chose to hand out a directive that told people to go find a forklift and log on. Too many workers were handed strip trailers to work (it was overemphasized), and there was no responsible balance within an altered operation. And too many people had no outbound experience, and/or they had no feel for the job. A different cycle had begun. Poor loads occurred with a new frequency. Reworks became ordinary business. People measured what every person on a forklift was doing and then tried to derive meaning out of that type of motion. But the operations got worse. Watching space and travel time get wasted day after day suggested that something was wrong. Wrong motion was being encouraged and wrong motions were not being remedied. The cross-dock directive gave everyone on the main dock the same job. It allowed Yellow to see what every single worker was doing on a very simple basis. That strip and stack simplicity ensured that cube was being built on a mediocre and massive basis. Finding adequate cube, and the ability to effectively create outbound cube on a consistent basis (as in every potential handling) was not really the order. Waste of cube and waste of travel time were predictable. They were stark visuals. The positioning of workers within the operation and the placement of doors with respect to those workers in motion, workers who were required to go find a door and make a subsequent decision upon, reinforced poor results. It was a waste of talent. It was a waste of personnel. And most important, it was a waste of potential revenue. Yellow higher ups

handed down defunct orders to keep that process moving day after day. It equated to error in motion.

As the end neared at Yellow, numbers and metrics were in fact meaningless. If the task of the worker was fundamentally incorrect, or, the work environment did not promote progressive results, then by design the whole model was flawed because it encouraged awkward freight motions, even failure. So where is the meaning in those motions? There is none because the motion is incorrect. The mission at Yellow should have been to fix the model, then measure all coordinated motions, motions that by design encourage and promote correct motions. The company went in an entirely different direction.

Load your own freight sounds wonderful. There's no shortage of big thinkers who consider it very efficient. But, within a real LTL consolidation center universe, does anything really suffer? The dictum of load-your-own-freight and stressing it incessantly (to get that cross-dock percentage high especially on an outbound basis) encourages poor loads, especially if your available workforce has been devalued. And if an operation suffers from too many new performers, too many inexperienced actors, too many actors who are obviously out of place, and/or a careless mix of strip and stack runners, load mediocrity is virtually guaranteed. Yellow 813 terminal was already suffering before the rollout. With the rollout, suddenly the terminal was faced with several big hurdles, ugly absorptions and collisions which negatively impacted the whole operation. Poor running outbound cube was one of the by-products. It happened in Tracy because it had to happen. The range of stack choices were too narrow. The thinking going into the stack side of the operation was too narrow. The amount of freight getting forced into trailers by a poor mix of stack operators was blatant and obvious.

Consider that with a cross-dock dictum, everyone (in theory) is on a forklift doing the same job, the same thing hour after hour, all shift long. Each person is both a stripper and a stacker. Each person takes freight out of an assigned trailer (a strip), and they take their freight to a destination door. Their journey could be short, it could

be far. They are encouraged to load their freight, which often is just a force freight into a load trailer which as an action can be irrespective of how a building load appears. In other words, the running cube may be of a low grade, but they enter anyway. They add their shipment irrespective of bay capacity. They add their shipment irrespective of load grade. What happens to a load that is already degraded, especially if more freight gets pushed into it? It didn't matter. People load their freight irrespective of the future. Remember, more workers are coming. But the mission was accomplished. A full scan was completed.

The problem is not just one of poor running cube, and that by acting thus, the loads in this format often require a rework, a good fixing, more time and effort to pull things apart and reconfigure the load. It might happen, it might not. In effect, we are simply hoping that loads will adequately form, especially with the addition of poor grade dock workers. A rash of loads can become quickly compromised. If the dock is subjected to a combination of poor grade dock workers and an incessant cross-dock directive that aims at a high cross-dock percentage, then load quality (especially outbound load quality) should be predictable. The decision to load a shipment can be weak time and time again, different dock worker after different dock worker. All of them are contributors. They are all trying to add their shipments, one at a time. The motion itself is weak, especially if the running cube is already problematic. If not corrected, and it continues to be compounded by more and more independent actors who force in their freight, what should be the expectation? The plan is to just load a shipment and get back to a strip trailer, then begin this process over and over. This style of work is detrimental. It is a weak puzzle building process. The potential for a rework is too high. Reworks are lost labor hours. Claims become more frequent because more handlings are involved. However, a poor load might be sent without a rework. Depending on the grade of the load, there is the potential for high claims and high employee frustration at the next terminal. Shipments therein have too often lost their integrity, which in application is nothing short of a disservice to the entire business community.

So, although this might appear repetitive, we return to our initial problem which

is one of position. A flurry of different workers has arrived from a wide mix of different strip trailers. Everyone spends an allotment of time and effort to throw their specific shipment within a load trailer. Often, after a succession of little decisions, that load becomes an ugly collection of freight. There's no other way to describe it. The load stinks. Too many independent acting workers compound a running problem. With respect to sound cube, it is an obvious loser. And it remains a running load, the problem still exists, it hasn't gone away. Some workers might continue to add to it, and other workers won't. A dock worker or manager might decide on the trailer. Someone might make a judgment on it, to stop the bleeding, because more and more workers will probably come by and simply add their stuff to the mix. There is the possibility that a proactive worker will come along and take it upon himself to correct the bad puzzle before proceeding, but that is only a possibility, not protocol. Workers who take it upon themselves to correct the poor work behaviors of other workers do get tired of it. It's only natural. They get back to their own strip trailer and do what they can on a small basis knowing that the machinery is too big, that their one effort at correcting the problem is nothing but a waste of time. These workers also might ask themselves "Why make my day harder? To do the right thing? I'm not here to cover for anybody."

It's just another by-product of a defunct model. In Tracy, responsible dock workers locked into the cross-dock directive too often lost their energy which aimed to correct the activity of those rock head strippers who were consistently adding their freight to poor running loads. It was an ugly cycle, a feature of the strip/stack cross-dock model. Unfortunately, one of the side effects of this model can be the risk it poses to the work habits of the most proficient stack side dockworkers, if those dockworkers can even be bothered anymore. Workers can lose interest very quickly especially if they see the flaw. They also might consider that there might not be any end in sight to the stack madness. It's not in their interest to fix items that occur on a regular and massive basis. It's easier for them to just ease into the cross-dock crowd and not try to frustrate themselves over it. And in Tracy, it was unfortunate because many of the terminal's best performers opted out. They took an easier road. Yellow had no respect for their potential value. This loss of value was just a feature of the cross-dock model, and it should be noted as

such. Somehow it was justified because many of the big number guys were often viewed as heroes, strip and stack guys who too often simply compounded the problem in load trailers until the running cube simply amounted to an absurd mix of freight. And many of the proficient stack side workers wanted little to do with it. They weren't here to cover for a company that had a blatant engineering flaw, and a company that had no stack side value. Yellow had proved that much by design.

In the computer a worker would show a one handling success, a one bill cross-dock success, but in dock space, the endeavor was often a simple failure. There was potential waste to cube everywhere. There were potential lost labor hours everywhere. Because, in actual dock and trailer space (what was happening) instead of one handling, it could (and did) often amount to several handlings, an initial strip to stack handling where the bill was initially added to a building load, then a second handling of a back strip, then perhaps a third handling because the bill must be loaded once again. A back strip could go to one of three places, into a new stack door, into the same trailer that is taken apart and reconfigured to maximize cube more effectively, or upon the dock (in a bay) where it eventually will be handled as a future stack. In any event, it is multiple handlings. The potential for damage and customer dissatisfaction increases as well. The model did not encourage effective one-and-done handlings, at least not on a responsible business basis. Waste was indeed everywhere. And the process continued. It doesn't take a leap of imagination to visualize the potential revenue lost in that type of activity, especially if that is happening in large consolidation centers, even if it's just one barn that's engaged in that losing activity.

The numbers kept adding up. Independent stripping/stacking dock workers did as they were told, adding to the success of production totals each time their shipments were placed within another load door. Their cross-dock percentages were high, and their bills per hour numbers were high, because all they really had to do was strip and stack, just drop and run, add their shipment and get back to their trailer. And behind the computer screen, they continued to look fantastic. The company had created strip & stack cross-dock heroes, but with respect to the business, too often those heroic efforts were nothing but disastrous. After all, Yellow was in the business of making 3

dimensional puzzles, puzzles of cube that amount to revenue per trailer, especially on the outbound where trailers travel far distances and cube is at a premium. With the formation and utilization of such a cross-dock beast, a roll-out dock operation filled with trailer stuffing heroes, the company had encouraged, intentionally or not, the construction of poor loads on massive levels. Consequently, poor running loads became ordinary business.

A cross-dock model that puts crews on a starting line, hands out a bunch of strips, then says “Go!” is a model based on hope. Even if there are efforts at massaging in freight by all cross-dock participants, we hope that loads will come together, because we really don’t know if they will or not. What are we putting our trust in? If our purpose is to achieve better cube, then we must admit error with this type of directive. And in Tracy, this directive encouraged load mediocrity. With so much emphasis on handing out strip trailers and no real hands-on focus on the stack side of the operation (especially on the outbound), and because the race began thus, by design all workers were really doing was crossing their fingers on a massive basis. That type of activity hoped that loads would somehow adequately come together. Remember, everyone was acting independently in this model. The goal was to grab your own stuff from a strip trailer, get your shipment loaded, try to avoid paying up your freight, and get back to your strip trailer. Is that even a plan of attack? Maybe it is within a truckload operation. But within a major LTL consolidation center, a terminal that has multiple outbound doors spread out all over the place, the design is weak.

Avoiding the bay is a concept we need to keep in mind. A full interpretation of the cross-dock directive can come into view, one that demonstrates the gross and destructive flaw at achieving cube, because our choices are very limited, our load options remain narrow. We have devalued the bay (within the present, and within the near future because more shipments will be arriving), a bay that gives us a higher probability at achieving better cube, especially if a proficient puzzle builder is in the area, a worker that has an eye on running loads and corresponding bays. And unlike that value of the bay activity, the cross-dock model renders load plans virtually useless, because individuals that monitor loads are not present because those types of workers

are preoccupied with their own strip. Real load plans take time to interpret. They emit values geared for one set of experienced eyes. The cross-dock strip to stack model in Tracy made load plans ineffective tools, which is sad since this is the computer age. And dock workers had computers mounted on their forklifts.

A more functional model steps over all that activity. It excels because the best puzzle builders in a terminal have the most opportunities to positively affect loads. They are fixed in place, they aren't required to go anywhere, and information of value is provided to them if needed. Their load decisions are by nature superior to those dock workers who are not as proficient on the stack side of an outbound operation. Workers who are of a poor puzzle building grade have automatically been placed in positions that won't allow them to negatively impact any outbound running load. Workers who are less adept at loading (building 3 dimensional puzzles) don't have the opportunity to make poor loading decisions, they aren't able to keep stepping on loads all over a terminal. Their position doesn't allow it.

A more functional model (especially a premier model) that relies on the experience of the terminal's best puzzle builders operates much differently. Those fixed loaders aren't interested in forcing in freight prematurely, especially if they have access to adequate bay space and a load plan. That person can see what freight is on hand. They can see what freight will also soon arrive. They might make decisions to hold freight especially if they know that a certain trailer isn't going anywhere soon. Urgency is a senseless condition which is promoted within antiquated models. But it's not a concern within a premier model where real motion is encouraged. Remember, we're only concerned with correct positioning, maintaining work between dock and yard, and maintaining a correct fluid dynamic. Adequate cube and a strong gate to gate will take care of itself by design.

Whether Yellow was running a grossly antiquated model, a model that like its culture was severely retarded, or was running a model that was specifically engineered for certain failure, all attempts at measuring production were meaningless. Yellow sought

a number visual, one that stressed all individuals to push their pieces into rectangular prisms. Shipments were stripped, shipments were loaded, and shipments were docked. People studied computer screens trying to make sense of it all, trying to identify what each person was doing, trying to identify how each shift was producing. Numbers were assigned, numbers that reflected false value(s). Worrying about a bills per hour goal or a cross-dock numbers goal was in effect entering the territory of the absurd. The model that the entire crew was subjected to was not only fundamentally weak, but it promoted poorly loaded trailers, especially as the management team encouraged every worker to hop onto their own forklift, log onto their own computer, get after their own strip trailer, stress to them to try to avoid the bays and try to keep shoving freight into loads, then scurry back to their own strip assignment. In working theory, it was nothing more than an uncoordinated mess because the collective activity was detrimental to achieving quality loads, and detrimental to maintaining adequate running cube. The whole endeavor was erroneous, even misleading because the cross-dock directive in Tracy promoted load mediocrity especially with the gross addition of poor working grade out-of-house dock workers. But that was the design. That's what Yellow wanted. Was it even worth measuring? Why measure work mediocrity? Where is the interest in that?

An impression must be made on what these companies do as businesses. The goals should be to achieve one-and-done-cube (meaning no reworks), respect freight integrity (meaning the freight stays clean as it is pushed through the system), keep the load grade high (meaning outbound trailers are loaded on optimum levels), and do these things on an unimpeded basis. The model is correct because the motion is correct. Maintaining customer satisfaction happens because the customer knows inherently that the model gives each shipment the best opportunity to arrive on time and be showroom ready. The motion of the LTL model should be understood by all parties involved.

Why engage in a destructive model? If filling outbound trailers responsibly isn't relevant to LTL profitability, then carriers might as well just savagely throw freight in stack trailers irrespective of maintaining safe running cube. If an LTL carrier can't

achieve consistent cube on a safe and efficient basis, then it's not a healthy business. On the stack side of the operation, Yellow took a misstep. Loads were compromised on a massive basis. A legitimate business team would've seen it. It can't be denied, nor can it be avoided. Even if it was just at the Tracy terminal, and Tracy alone, Yellow promoted incorrect motion. The model was flawed. And it was driven home hard.

Unless an LTL model is fixed, every consideration to profitability has no foundation. Nobody should be content with keeping any antiquated model standing, especially if that model is designed in a way to keep things stagnant, to keep motions weak, to keep workers out of position, to keep charitable communities of inexperience in place like bands of ticks. LTL carriers should be designed razor sharp with a mission to maintain that sharpness despite all the pressures that surround these companies. LTL carriers need to somehow become protected from interests that institute directives which encourage poor motion, especially those motions that are given as work directives to low grade inexperienced dock workers. LTL carriers also need protection from interests that are lured towards an LTL capital prize, a prize enticing enough for the crash-landing crowd to suddenly arrive, people bent on tearing down the whole edifice, to liquidate it, and then add those cash holdings to their growing coffers. Only a small community of people benefit from those types of activities.

## 7 | The Tracy Doors

The problem with the carnival of doors was they never did get figured out,  
or maybe they did, maybe they were fashioned just right,  
maybe some of us were getting paranoid,  
maybe not.

There was a perception on the dock that the whole door setup was just a work in progress. Yellow was going to iron this thing out, and eventually fix it so we could all get better. So long as we had computers to follow, we could take our freight here and there and not worry about something so banal as door change, even if the frequency of those door changes became bothersome, even if the place remained confusing. For workers lost in concentration, the placement of doors was a distant consideration. It was all secondary to the effort at hand. The activity of door change didn't need mentioning. Besides, we didn't even know who was doing all of it. For many of us, the activity of door placements and the endless rotation of several doors were just things that Yellow Corporation would probably figure out. At some point, the engineers at Yellow would get the whole thing right.

But with the new rollout, the place had become completely unbalanced. After a while, as door change took on a dumb momentum, the company was placed on a silent notice. The conversations were changing. For myself, discussing the problem with people who couldn't hold their tongues was avoided. Those workers who were cemented hard into cliques were sidestepped. People who remained lost within their earbud universe were busy catching butterflies. Those people who saw the world through a narrow union lens were also avoided because many of them were chatterboxes. It wasn't a good idea to share certain ideas with them. Specific things

weren't happening on this big dock, things that unions by design must do in order to retain real value within the workplace. The union here was shit, and some of us knew it. At this stage of the game, who could you really trust?

But there was value on the dock. Tracy had dock workers who were adults. And they weren't pigeonholed at all. They had eyes and ears on the whole dock, and they were pointing out one bad door placement after another bad door placement, especially those doors which were not only irregular but were completely unrelated to their own specific operation. Poorly set doors were all over the eligible inbound/outbound dock, examples were everywhere, but those examples would suddenly disappear. And then another poor door arrangement would appear. And each arrangement was a snapshot in time. With respect to positive motion, all of them were ineffective. Sometimes large sections of doors would get swapped out, and some of those doors were the heaviest doors in the terminal, full of forklift traffic. Some of those moves were grossly incorrect, some of those moves were bold, and some of those moves prompted red flags because essentially many of the doors were appearing in the wrong neighborhood. Their incorrect placements were: a.) increasing forklift travel time, and b.) encroaching upon other operations. Not only were the placements confusing, but they couldn't be justified. Doors became devalued especially in areas where long successions of unrelated points were placed next to one another, door after door.

We weren't engineers but some of us had been around a long time. We knew fundamentals and things were happening on this plane that were fundamentally incorrect. We also knew the Tracy dock jungle. Doors were being placed erroneously, and we knew it. Some of those door placements were beyond suggestive especially as these bad alterations continued. And some of those placements were downright bold. The thinking of men who were paying attention continued to change. Yellow had entered the realm of the absurd, and the company was choosing to stay there. So, suggesting that they were doing anything of meaning or value was giving them far too much credit. Door misplacements weren't getting remedied. Every configuration bequeathed to 813 had the same effect. Eventually, for the guys who were studying the place the language was changing. The engineers at Yellow were either dumb, or the

engineers at Yellow were prepping the place. In either case, they were going to bury us. There was nothing we could do to get them to just knock it off.

The dock layout during the whole rollout, from beginning to end, was set abnormally and was remiss of traditional looking operations. This flat workspace had a strange mix of outbound, inbound, and city trap doors blended. Operations now were overlapping and not just on the edges. An outbound door could be anywhere, on the odd side from the 3 door all the way to the 115 door, and on the even side from the 4 door all the way to the 126 door. For example, in the final dock snapshot just before the closure, there was an outbound door loading in the 126 door, and there was an outbound door loading in the 4 door. Both southern and northern lengths of the dock were pock marked with outbound load doors, some of them even appeared deep within the nucleus of inbound operation. The inbound had lost its stark contrast. Once the blending of doors was a permanent style, no matter what the door rotation and no matter what the snapshot, the plane of working space had become one big inbound/outbound blended operation. Though needlessly stretched out, the inbound obviously had more definition than the outbound because the outbound definition was gone. During the entire course of post rollout, the outbound was an absolute mess of doors which ran the course of both lengths, as far as it could possibly be extended.

The northeast corner of the dock had the 8 & 10 door vertex. The southeast corner of the dock had the 7 & 9 door vertex. So, north to south, the eastside width had doors that were designated as such: 8, 6, 4, 2, 1, 3, 5, and 7. The 1 door and the 2 door on the east width were not eligible for stripping & stacking, dumpsters were placed in those doors. If the flat plane of the dock was to be folded lengthwise, the crease would be at the 1 & 2 doors. This whole area, the east width, both vertices on the east side and a few doors on the north length and the south length were often referred to as the horseshoe. It follows, the south length of the dock ran with doors 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, etc., a succession of doors until the last inbound/outbound eligible door was the 115 door, and the north length of the dock ran with doors 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, etc., a succession of doors until the last inbound/outbound eligible door was at the 126 door, beyond that was the city operation and eventually the northwest vertex. So, for the

inbound/outbound operation (and I blend them as dock eligible because that is how Yellow wanted to play the game), the odd side eligible doors ranged from the 3 door to the 115 door. The even side eligible doors ranged from the 4 door to the 126 door. Beyond the 115 & 126 doors was non eligible space.

The carousel of moving doors had sliced the outbound operation wide open. The tinkering continued and the unfamiliar became the norm. In fact, it never ended. It was one of the indelible features of the rollout. Doors continued to disappear then reappear somewhere else. Usually, a dock foreman would mention door changes during a tailgate. They'd tell workers what doors to look for, especially if the computer wasn't reading the prompt yet. And sometimes door changes wouldn't even get mentioned. But the alterations continued. During daylight hours, there would be the maintenance guys with their motorized ladder, going door to door, changing signs. No inbound door was safe. No outbound door was safe. Outbound load doors were appearing everywhere, all along both lengths. There was the semblance of a centrally located inbound operation that had load doors ranging from Fresno (519) in the 59 door, to Redding (512) in the 120 door. And this blending of operations was taking a toll. Rules were being broken.

If an inbound worker must work around misplaced outbound load doors, doors that appear within the nucleus of an inbound operation, or doors that appear on the other side of the operation which takes outbound traffic through the inbound operation, then what is the purpose of setting those outbound load doors there? If an outbound door is set within or on the wrong side of an inbound operation, an inbound operation whose participants will not strip freight bound for those outbound load doors, then what is that load door doing there? That door is misplaced. It's drawing in wasteful unrelated traffic and forcing that unrelated traffic into or across the inbound operation. That door is also taking up valuable space that could be given to the city or inbound operations. The more of those unrelated doors appear within or on the wrong side of the inbound operation, the more distorted the whole operation becomes.

To reiterate, to set an outbound load door within or on the other side of an inbound

operation is erroneous. Where are those outbound load door shipments coming from? From what types of trailers are they being stripped? They are generated from where? Dockworkers stripping from outside the inbound operation (from city pickups and 813 satellite terminals) will continue to move into and past the inbound operation with every shipment designated for those misplaced doors. Just before the collapse, two big examples of this were Portland and Seattle, inappropriately set on the wrong side of the inbound operation. They also had satellites which were specific to each consolidation center, and some of those satellites had outbound load doors which were direct loading in Tracy. They were spread out all over both lengths of the terminal. Portland and Seattle were set alone in the 113 door and the 109 door. They were wedged in near the dock ramp, set alone away from all their specific satellites. All points adjacent to (875) and (642) were meaningless partners because these two outbound monsters, a few of the biggest players on the west coast, did not belong there. It was a total waste of valuable space, space that should've been designated for city or inbound specifics. Instead, in one of its last weird door configurations, Yellow chose to place these two monster terminals within an odd neighborhood and wedge them in near the ramp, right on the edge of the whole operation. Portland and Seattle were outbound load doors and were not specific to the inbound operation in Tracy. Adjacent to these 2 outbound load doors was a Walmart trap in the 115 door, an AAFES trap in the 111 door, further down was an Amazon trap, some inbound strips, and a pair of San Jose (390) load doors in the 99 and 101 doors. All those doors along the southern length of dock were completely unrelated to Portland and Seattle. Essentially, Portland and Seattle were set incorrectly. They were set alone, far away from their own specific strip traffic. And they were set alone away from their own related Northwest load doors.

The misplacement of Portland and Seattle might seem insignificant. But door misplacements force wayward traffic. Again, where were shipments for those doors being drawn from? They were primarily coming out of Tracy city pickups and Tracy satellite strips, trailers usually plugged east of the inbound operation. Those load door placements forced inefficiency. It extended forklift travel time. And it stretched out the outbound operation to absurd proportions, to a blended extent where the outbound lost all meaningful definition. Portland and Seattle were in effect, doors of neglect set far

away from any meaningful supervision. Portland and Seattle were not specific terminals to inbound strips, strips that contained freight coming from far point terminals. They didn't have a meaningful relation to inbound strip trailers. Inbound strips from Bloomington or Phoenix might contain some northwest freight. But those amounts (of misloaded freight) should not factor into a decision that sets Portland and Seattle into the 113 and 109 doors, an outbound load area that draws in traffic from far away strips on the other side of the inbound operation.

An outbound load door for San Diego, or Las Vegas, or Orange, or Bakersfield, or Portland, or Seattle, or Tacoma, or Spokane, or Medford, would not receive meaningful traffic from inbound strips coming into Tracy from far point terminals such as Chicago (309), Harrisburg (135), Nashville (422), and all other major consolidation centers that would load trailers destined for Tracy (813). Those far point terminal strip trailers would contain Tracy city freight, and they would be stuffed with Tracy satellite terminals such as Sacramento, Redding, San Francisco, Santa Rosa, Reno, Visalia, Fresno, San Jose, West Sacramento, and Oakland. Those destinations were Tracy satellite terminals, and they were specific to the inbound operation. Far point consolidation centers weren't stuffing westbound shipments into Tracy that were unspecific to Tracy, shipments that were specific to other consolidation centers such as Bloomington, Portland, and Seattle. Terminals with misplaced load doors such as San Diego, Las Vegas, Orange, Bakersfield, Portland, Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane, Medford, were not specific terminals to Tracy. And these types of load doors were sprinkled all around and on the other side of the inbound operation. Those misplacements brought in bad unrelated traffic.

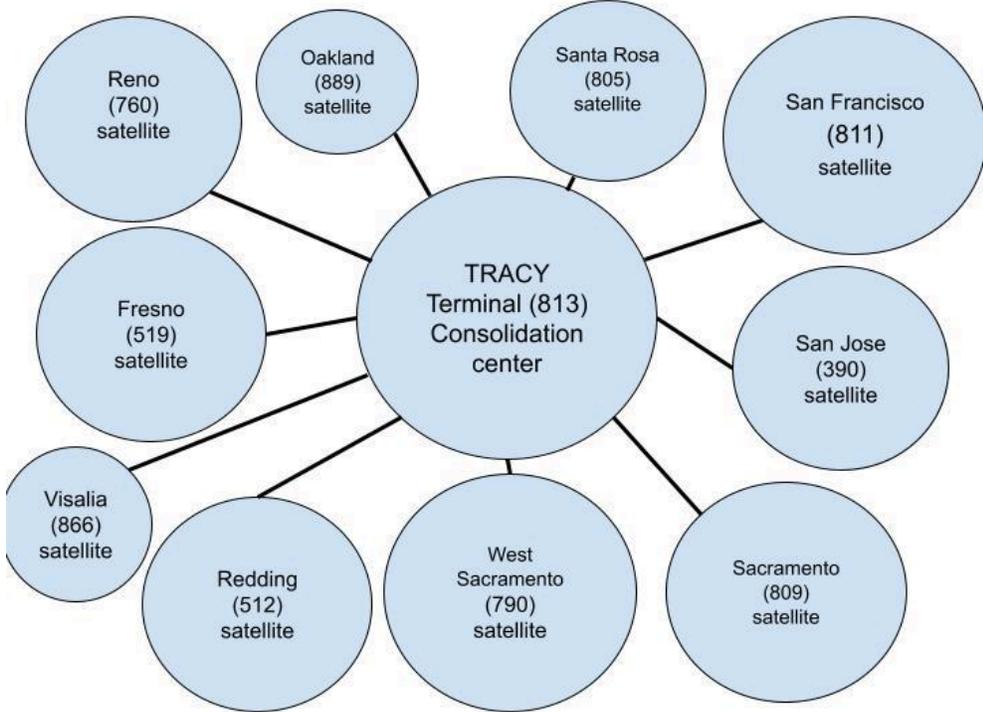
Other than the inbound/outbound edge of the operation, wherever that connecting point may be, to set outbound load doors (even regional load doors) adjacent to inbound strips, adjacent to inbound load doors, or on the wrong side of the inbound operation, that door placement activity can't be justified, not at a terminal the size of 813. They are not specific to the inbound operation. They do not add any value. Those points are specific to other consolidation centers, not Tracy. In other words, Chicago isn't loading San Diego to Tracy. Chicago is loading San Diego to San Diego directly, or

to Bloomington which is specific to Southern California freight. So, if there are no San Diego or Orange shipments being stripped out of Tracy inbound strips, then why place a San Diego load door or an Orange load door within the heart of the inbound operation? Even if there was freight appearing within inbound strips destined for terminal (600), why place that load door bound for Bakersfield on the wrong side of the inbound operation, in the 126 door, far away from outbound strips, and far away from Bloomington that was loading in the 20 door? Even if there was a significant amount of freight coming out of inbound strips for those points, essentially misloads, why place those doors within the inbound operation? They were unspecific terminals. They needed to be fixed within a functional and correctly ordered outbound operation.

The system was designed specifically. Satellite terminals had coordinated relationships with their own specific consolidation center. All satellite doors specific to Tracy contained value, and each strip trailer coming from far point terminals contained value. Each door space contained a value specific to its own operation. It's erroneous to place an unrelated load door or an unrelated strip door within the range of an inbound operation, or on the wrong side of an inbound operation. Whether those door placements were bold or subtle, it didn't matter. Valuable space was encroached upon. Wayward traffic became the norm because poorly set doors were drawing in unrelated traffic. For instance, during Yellow's last gasps, the 94 door (an area already suffering from a lack of bay space), was drawing in unrelated traffic because the computer was prompting workers to take their freight to that location. Orange (896) was not specific to Tracy. The misplaced door, a door that should have been set somewhere east of the inbound operation, was devaluing inbound space. And in a consolidation center the size of Tracy, every door has a value, some come with very specific values, especially those which appear in the middle of the dock, or within the heart of a specific operation.

Far point terminals that loaded to Tracy weren't aiming for terminals that were unspecific to the Tracy consolidation center. What they were aiming for was to get shipments as close as possible to their destination. And those destinations would have a specific inbound or city load door. Inbound crews worked those types of trailers, trailers that aimed freight at the Tracy terminal and its specific range of satellite

terminals. So what satellites were specific to Tracy? Was Orange a Tracy satellite? Was San Diego a Tracy satellite? Was Tacoma a Tracy satellite? Some terminals were specific to 813, others were not. Satellites specific to Tracy:



An inbound specific load door (especially a heavy one) should always be set within its own operation, and near all inbound strip trailers. Inbound crews don't need to be looking at or working around outbound load doors. Those doors are unrelated. If they are working around them, then those doors have been set incorrectly. Erroneous door placements can stretch out the inbound operation. Those doors also draw in unrelated outbound stripping traffic. Every space, each door within an inbound operation must have a specific inbound value or it doesn't belong, plain and simple.

Other than city route destinations and city trap destinations, the lion's share of inbound strips contained freight with destinations to the above satellites. The decision to place anything inside the inbound operation, anything unrelated to that range of

Tracy satellites was false. And 813, in all its rollout snapshots, had an inbound operation that was pock marked with unspecific load doors that appeared within the operation. Unspecific doors also appeared on the wrong side of the inbound operation which forced outbound strip traffic to sweep through the inbound operation with each handling. Each handling was essentially wasted motion, additional travel time because of that initial door misplacement. Each of those door placements were engineering falsehoods. The goal within a large terminal such as Tracy is to decrease travel time, not increase it. One objective is to not bring in unrelated traffic. However, a poor door placement that is unspecific to an operation will guarantee wayward traffic. That's how operations become unbalanced.

Wasted motion of cross-dock participants driving from low number doors to high number doors was undeniable. Workers drove past vast arrays of unrelated doors because of the blended operation and the misplaced doors set within or on the wrong side. San Francisco (811), San Jose (390), Santa Rosa (805), Sacramento (809), Oakland (889), and West Sacramento (790) were big inbound satellite terminals. Because of the rotation of doors throughout the rollout, they were never fixed in place. And fixed in place means fixed in place. That simplicity didn't happen during the rollout. The goal should have been to set them correctly, to fix them in place, then leave them alone so crews could get fully acclimated to their work environment. An inbound operation needs to be familiar to become efficient, safe, and satellite friendly.

Yellow Corporation chose to act strangely. The strip door placements and erroneous load door placements in tandem with one another were conducive to bad traffic and wasteful driving. And if city bills were in far off strips, the entire operation would be swept through. Stripping out of low number doors (especially within the horseshoe) and cutting through the whole operation whether it be a disproportionate blend of city travel, inbound travel, and/or outbound travel, was all fundamentally incorrect because the operations had been blended. Therefore, the contents of a strip trailer, especially a city pick up or a strip trailer coming in from one of Tracy's satellite terminals, could potentially take a worker anywhere. The more misplaced doors within a whole operation, the more wasted motion. And if large numbers of workers in those low

number strip trailers are of a poor working dock grade, especially in a terminal the size of Yellow Tracy, the work traffic becomes uncoordinated, the freight behaviors become toxic. Just a single worker that works a strip trailer and is forced to travel in and across other operations can have a profound effect on dock motions and load configurations.

Case in point: the motions of utility drivers stripping out of high number doors such as the 112,114,116,118, etc., then being forced to take multiple shipments all the way past and through the inbound operation, down to outbound load doors set within the horseshoe. That was the forklift activity early in the rollout. Then Yellow reversed it. The big broom of utility drivers was fashioned again. Doors were readjusted. Utility drivers stripped from low number doors within the horseshoe and swept up to outbound load doors which were improperly set on the other side of the inbound operation. Workers followed computer prompts and their wayward dock journeys began. With a vast collection of misplaced doors and with fundamental rules being broken all over the dock, the design prompted waste.

One goal within a functional model is to reduce forklift travel time. Lost travel time is avoided by not venturing into other specific operations, to contain assignments within a specific operation. Inbound load doors (specific satellites) should correspond to the crews that primarily strip freight going into those load doors, and to confine crews to the smallest given work area possible so long as everything within that area is specific to their assignments. The goal is not to travel down long stretches of the dock looking for doors that are misplaced deep into other operations. Why encroach on another operation when it's not necessary to do so? The goal is to set doors correctly, then those types of problems go away. Another goal is to have landing spots that are familiar and close to home. Outbound dock workers need to stay home and focus on stripping trailers for outbound load purposes. At a terminal the size of Tracy, if their outbound load door targets are not in eyesight of their outbound strip trailer (whether city pick up or satellite strip), there's probably something wrong. But after the big roll out, operations were overlapping. Forklift ventures were going past unrelated door after unrelated door until finally some outbound load door would appear. And when the work of getting the shipment there was done, loaded or bayed up, the forklift driver

would drive empty all the way back down the dock, past more unrelated doors, until finally getting back to his work assignment. Sometimes the computer prompt was to take shipment after shipment to some far-off misplaced point. When all the company had to do was properly set the outbound operation, contain it, and not blend it all the way down to the 126 door. If the edge of the inbound operation was the 59 and 64 doors (a distorted edge, but an edge nonetheless), then no outbound load doors should have been placed past that inbound edge.

How much Portland and Seattle freight was being generated by inbound strip trailers? What (non-satellite) terminals were using Tracy to get their shipments to Portland and Seattle? No matter what the answer, the 109 and 113 door placements of Seattle and Portland can't be justified. These were false placements. Later, false outbound door placements will take on a new meaning especially as loads are graded. People going in and out of those loads will also be graded. Poor door placements coupled with poor dock working behaviors can't be avoided. It's a valid discussion and both items must be discussed together because in tandem with one another the cross-dock directive can take on a different meaning. That directive was a contributor to a building problem in Tracy. Collective damage was being performed, especially for several hours a night when one ingredient was most intense. Outbound loads, especially far off outbound loads free from any responsible supervision, too often ran out of responsible puzzle building control.

The only real engineering accomplishment to the Tracy terminal in the company's last stages was turning up the volume on degrees of difficulty for all dock workers. Difficulties increased as the inbound doors, outbound doors, and trap accounts continued to change, and continued to mesh. Portland and Seattle got wedged in near the end of the whole eligible operation. Clearly, they were misplaced. Their specific direct loading satellites were misplaced as well. Even with the unleashing of an intensified cross dock directive, the destruction of a clearly defined Northwest outbound working area was absurd. If nothing else, it made the place less familiar. The scattering of Northwest points all up and down both lengths of eligible dock, from low number to doors in the horseshoe to high number doors such as the 124 door, was absurd. Were

these absurdities engineering falsehoods? What happened to those load doors? One thing that happened is they frequently morphed into load aberrations. The roll-out design had obliterated the Tracy graveyard outbound hybrid because that satellite work disappeared. It went elsewhere. Satellite trailers were gifted to inexperienced others. Those other workers were directed to work those shipments on the Tracy dock. That activity, by itself, was not only odd but it was dangerous to the business of maintaining cube on an outbound load basis. It was also dangerous to customer shipments, customers who had put their trust in Yellow to effectively ship their product on a timely and responsible basis.

And right on the edge of the inbound/outbound blend of an operation were two doors. Portland and Seattle were suddenly free of responsible hands-on supervision. The 109 door and the 113 door drew in a rash of far-off traffic. Much of that traffic was hasty, much of that traffic was bothersome to inbound crews, much of that traffic was coming from the hands of out-of-house performers, and much of that traffic was of a poor dock working grade. Portland and Seattle were set alone deep within the wrong neighborhood, and they became running load doors of abject neglect.

Segregating Portland and Seattle from other northwest points might seem innocent enough, but with a cross-dock beast coming into play, they became far away devalued load doors. Their corresponding points scattered throughout the terminal were items of neglect as well. The poor running cube of these trailers pointed to some new facts. These doors were now unsupervised, traditional load zones had been torn apart, and the hybrid model that ensured outbound load integrity was thrown in the trash. Now, the terminal was dealt with ugly little running creations, little projects, perhaps reworks, perhaps not. Perhaps a junior worker would be given an assignment to back strip these rollout messes and reconfigure them. New decisions might come into play because the model itself was weak, the puzzle building activity was wayward, and the puzzle builders who were familiar with those doors were no longer collectively participating on any meaningful level. Like the doors, the place itself was disoriented. And cross-dock participation was occurring on irresponsible levels.

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For years I had worked closely with a handful of other senior men on the outbound, getting through strips while monitoring certain load doors. It wasn't perfect, but it worked. We could load trailers on an effective basis, consolidate any expedited freight, and put together particular sets of trailers for over the road transit. It was the same guys doing the same tasks, year after year. Other than a few guys toggling around from bid to bid, there was little change in the levels of outbound experience.

Change was rare and we did our thing. Senior men did the same tasks night after night, and the management team had little problem with the outbound operation. Most often it ran itself so long as work arrived on time. Occasionally there might be a driver breakdown from one of the satellites, or a city pick up might be late to hit the dock. But the operation was controlled. A weights and inspections guy might be buzzing about, asking dockworkers for assistance. Maybe a terminal operations manager might drift down to the outbound during the night just to see how we were doing. But mostly it was smooth sailing for any manager assigned to the outbound tower. All we needed were hostlers to plug trailers, and city drivers to find an open door somewhere close to home.

Eventually decisions would be made on a line haul basis. The whole thing was timed and very intuitive, guys knew when to adjust, when to shift more towards the stack side of the operation as the night evolved. And like clockwork, the same line haul professional would make his quick walk across the yard and walk up the stairs at the southeast corner of the dock. He had his same routine. He'd peek around the outbound dock. He'd look at trailers, and he'd look to make sets. He'd also coordinate with the same dockworkers. If he arrived with nothing to match, dockworkers would create loads for him so he could plan sets, sets going east, sets going south, and sets going to the northwest. He might stop for a brief chat before heading out. He knew what workers he could depend on to get the job done. Once satisfied, he would disappear into the night. A plan was set. The job got done. It was all very simple. It was all

predictable. It was all controlled.

Before the roll-out, the outbound had all sorts of room for improvement, but it was identifiable, it was effective, and it worked. All outbound doors, weakly stationed or not, were in sight. They remained in place long enough for crews to be familiar with their placement. Doors would occasionally get moved around, but not incessantly. The Northwest was set in the odd 40's, sometimes a single Portland and single Seattle to start, maybe two pups dedicated to 875 if the coming tonnage was high. A flex door would be somewhere close to the area usually used for stripping purposes early in the shift, maybe used for volume shipments, maybe for headloads, maybe for a direct load to a Portland or Seattle satellite such as 873 or 899. The coming volume suggested that set up the zone properly and fill trailers correctly given the shipments available. But cuts are cuts. If the directs didn't fill, they could easily be filled with other northwest freight. It could all be coordinated in one area. Trailers could get filled on a responsible basis even if combinations were required. The correct doors were present. The correct people were present. The freight entered trailers on an orderly basis, expedited freight was guaranteed, and the bill control was accurate. The linehaul guy could get a clean visual of everything. When it was time to go, it was time to go. Trailers would shut down, hostlers would do their thing, and the regional freight would get on the road. The whole dock, from the 39 door/bay to the 49 door/bay could potentially be wiped clean. The trailers loaded clean. All partials combined in a way so that, at minimum, Portland would have plenty of Tracy volume to strip, and move forward, even if an opportunity was missed at loading directly into a Portland satellite.

Sometimes pre-roll out, 813 couldn't generate enough volume to fill direct load pups before the cut times. But the effort was often there. The position of correctly placed doors and the position of correctly placed workers was available in case enough direct satellite shipments and/or volume arrived early enough. We had 27 feet of trailer to consider, cube to consider, and load factor to consider. If a Tacoma loading adjacent to Portland or Seattle could fill nicely, and on a timely and responsible basis, then the whole region benefited.

With the addition of Reddaway, and the addition of all that regional freight, and the design possibilities that such volume presented, the initial expectations on the dock were much different than the scattering of regional doors within the inbound/outbound blend that the engineers constructed. Yellow decided to go a different direction. Every set up of the whole inbound/outbound blend, all snapshots after each successive game of door-peek-a-boo, was not only alarming, but remained fundamentally incorrect. With no apparent remedy in sight, some workers suggested that the company was merely tipping its hand.

The absorption of Reddaway was supposed to get us in a new position, to get these load points razor sharp, to get load zones ordered in a regional friendly way. But that didn't happen. The placement of doors specific to Portland, Seattle, and Bloomington were irrespective of inbound and outbound specifics. The change of doors was also downright irrespective of other consolidation centers out west because those doors were spread out all over the terminal. And now with the hybrid gone, and with the cross-dock beast in full gear, regional load doors were not only neglected, but they were grossly misplaced. They were unsupervised by working experience, and the loads within them were often running out of responsible control. Pictures of loads were being taken of closed loads, but that activity was meaningless. Some workers complained that loads were getting called out on an unsecured basis, but that was a minor consideration. The significant aspect was outbound doors were often closed without a senior dock worker present. And for years, many senior workers policed those outbound loads. But in rollout Tracy, the doors were wildly blended and spread wide out. The days and nights of complaining about the problem were remedied. It's difficult to complain about a problem especially if you're not even present to witness it. The bid structure, the failure to keep high impact outbound players in high impact outbound positions, and the spreading out of outbound load doors away from traditional looking load zones, were all contributing factors. That design ensured that real hands-on supervision was not only lacking, but it was effectively gone.

Rollout Yellow operated differently. Lone door regional stepchildren were the new order of business, a design that placed regional doors in far off points, terminals that

were specific to Bloomington, Seattle, and Portland. Regional doors like 849, 880, 506, 873, 896, 833, 600, etc., were placed in a lost array of locations. These locations were not conducive to travel time, nor were they conducive to responsible freight flow. This regional stretching, and the frequency of the door change, became an uncoordinated mess. It was also negligent because of the incessant poor handling of satellite shipments. Regional doors were left like pillage points, doors subjected to the collective powers of cross-dock participation. Cut times or not, cube was often victimized. Reworks to these regional doors had become ordinary activities, which years previous was not a usual order of business. The mood to all the new changes in Tracy leaned heavily to the negative and many senior workers had opted out very early in the rollout. With little objection, they were willingly taking strips, blending into the cross-dock beast, taking the easy road, not worrying about load zones, and certainly not worrying about the dock design where regional load doors were spread out all over the terminal. There was no point of worrying about those regional concerns, because the regional load zones were gone. They had been obliterated.

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One evening a manager asked if I could start moving shipments out of the hazardous material bay. It was an activity I did frequently. Usually, I would park my forklift in the 96 bay just west of the inbound tower, then get busy. It was easy work, if shipments were billed, I'd look to move them. Much of the poison was often incompatible with running loads, so it would have to wait. But if the opportunity presented itself, I would focus on clearing as much of it out as possible. But this evening there was freight everywhere. The hazardous material bay was connected to the inbound tower on the north side. The hazmat bay was painted red and took up space between the tower and the aisle that ran parallel to the northern edge of the dock. The 90 bay, the 92 bay, and the 94 bay, were often filled with hazardous material shipments. Usually, they were contained close to the tower, but hazmat shipments could build and drift out towards the aisle. And there was another problem. A dimension apparatus took up bay space adjacent to the hazmat bay, just north of the tower as well. It needed to remain clear of

bayed up freight since dock workers would be prompted to take their shipments there and measure them with the touch of a computer screen. Yards above the freight, an overhead apparatus would roll over the shipment, take a picture, and if successfully done the dock worker could leave the area and continue their journey with the shipment.

Tonight, the entire area was a disaster. A new load door had been set. The 90 door now was designated for the (390) terminal. Like many other load doors, it was moving around the dock. Someone at Yellow had found a new home for it. It was fitted into a place that was already suffering from a lack of bay depth. And because of the dock design, there was no center aisle access to this area. The tower, the dimension apparatus, and the hazardous material bay had all gobbled-up space in the area. And the 90/92/94 doors all suffered. Unfortunately, those areas were pulling in large amounts of traffic because of the needs of other dock workers who were dropping off hazardous material freight, who were using the dimension apparatus, and who were going in and out of the 90 door to load their (390) shipments. The whole area was nothing more than a tight squeeze especially when strip activity was high.

I surveyed the area. Stepping away from it all, I went up to the tower and talked it over. Before I could even get to the hazardous material bay, I would have to carve my way in because freight surrounded the area. And that freight kept coming. Traffic wasn't stopping just because the area was hammered. The 90-door pressure was too intense, a monster satellite had settled in. Now (390) dominated the area, a load door that was basically set into a narrow crevice without a functional bay. And if it had just been a one night showing, like a bad run midnight movie, it might not have been a problem.

Maybe somebody at Yellow was curious, because the (390) monster lingered. The same cataclysm of freight kept happening once a heavy shift gained momentum. And it was like clockwork. I watched it happen because I had to step in and clean it up, night after night. It continued to happen because it had to happen. The design forced it to happen. It would descend into freight madness within a very short timeframe.

Terminal (390) was a beast of a satellite that drew in heavy amounts of freight all night long. It serviced cities such as San Jose, Santa Clara, Cupertino, Campbell, Los Gatos, Milpitas, Sunnyvale, Morgan Hill, and Saratoga. As a heavy inbound satellite, it didn't load like a city trap where workers could just floor load and run. 390 was San Jose, and as a functional load door on the inbound it deserved much more than two narrow travel aisles that T-sectioned near the load door. The tower, the hazmat area, and the dimension apparatus had gobbled up all other available bay space. And there San Jose was set to load. Those working around it were often forced to drive around to the other sides since the driving lanes would often disappear. The area was already cramped, a design which forced incoming workers to get freight in there, then get out of there, especially when the landing spots narrowed, or were lost altogether. Without an adequate bay, and all the traffic related to 390 and the traffic not related to 390, the design forced haste. It was basically placed in a pinch point area that had no functional bay, an area that was also drawing in other workers who were loading freight, workers trying to find places to bay up freight, workers dropping off hazardous materials, and workers using the dimension apparatus. Traffic was often unrelated, and it was thick. And the whole area could suddenly lose any semblance of a normal dock integrity. The Yellow engineers, wherever they were, had masterminded one. There was nothing subtle about it. The placement of San Jose to load in the 90 door was fundamentally incorrect. It did not satisfy some basic parameters that heavy inbound doors require.

The inbound stuff is simple. Once an inbound door placement is decided upon, then the terminal stays with it. It's a few decisions that shouldn't take very long at all, especially for a company that has been in the business a long time. Heavy satellites are kept home with careful respect to the working proximity of inbound strippers. Often, they are given backup doors. They are also given adequate bays of full depth that have center aisle access. The inbound operation is confined. The only door problem should be where to put more strips. Anything unrelated or unspecific to the operation should not be admitted. Traffic that is unrelated to the inbound should never be drawn in. You communicate any changes within your own operation to the inbound crew, and you don't mess with it. The one thing an inbound operation doesn't require is false engineering.

Instead, Yellow chose a new type of inbound working avenue. And for the San Jose terminal, they couldn't have picked a worse door! Of course, nothing beyond the 126 was eligible, the 117, 119, 121, 123, and 125 weren't eligible. They didn't exist! Anything past the 62 and 63 doors would be a bold stretch, but nonetheless a tactic they would try with two other inbound satellite monsters. Placement of San Jose into the 92 or the 94 would be blatantly stupid. Those doors would have floundered in a heartbeat. But the 90-door had everything that was required, everything a beast of a satellite needs to fail. But first, someone at Yellow decided to place San Jose into a busy and crooked crevice of a load door. Yellow chose to offer its employees a different kind of working area, one that was chaotic, and one that consistently needed troubleshooting. This night after night failure was not only suggestive, but it prompted hard questions. Was Yellow Corporation fucking with us? Were they monkeywrenching this place? I wasn't sure what other people were looking at. But I did know what I was looking at. I had to trod through this area which could quickly become a battlement of freight. In summary, it was dangerous. The decision to place San Jose there was nothing short of belligerent and negligent.

Also troubling, this area was directly in front of the tower and in plain sight. Also, the camera lens was right there, looking down at it all. The eye in the sky had a clear shot at this fabricated disaster area, an area where workers were destined to fail during peak strip hours. To watch failure hour after hour, handling after handling, is a form of freight masochism. An inbound operation within a major LTL consolidation center isn't a science lab. There should be no such thing as curiosity to watch workers fail. There's no purpose in experimenting with an operation to see if something works or if it doesn't work.

Maybe it was nothing more than ultra-poor business decision making. Or maybe the engineers were like precocious children who enjoy taking things apart. Maybe it was just paranoia on the part of a few workers who were actually paying attention. Or maybe, some of us were actually keying into something. As time passed, and as new rollout designs continued to produce horrible results, especially to adequate outbound cube, worker paranoia was taken off the table in Tracy. Tracy had morphed into an

ugly carnival far beyond our control. The place had become ridiculous. And Yellow Corporation was choosing to stay there.

The problem with paranoia is the fact that it's a mind construct and isn't part of the physical universe. Incorrect door placements were part of the physical universe. The volume of freight going to terminal 390 was part of the physical universe. The inadequate space in front of and adjacent to that load door was part of the physical universe. The number of workers coming to load or bay up their freight was part of the physical universe. The people coming into the area for hazardous material drop offs, those workers and their freight were part of the physical universe. All the forklifts that were prompted to use the dimension apparatus in the 90-door area, were part of the physical universe. All that wayward traffic was part of the physical universe. The jackknifing of freight in front of that pressurized crevice of a load door was part of the physical universe. The number of shipments that would pile up around the 90-door area, especially after trailers would close, were part of the physical universe. And while I worked the hazardous material bay, I watched those real motions happen right in front of me. I witnessed it night after night. Maybe paranoia is a symptom that sets in when workers must physically endure long successions of bad engineering. Who knows?

Doors continued to change in Tracy. And of course, San Jose did find a new home. Just before Yellow closed, it had settled into the 99/101 areas, a much more appropriate work area. But at that late stage, it didn't matter because the game of door-peek-a-boo never did get the chance to slow down. It never got fixed. The absurdity of that never-getting-fixed-process deserves to be noted, especially those examples which were bold fashions.

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Throughout the rollout, the inbound operation had a range of load doors, often Fresno, Reno, Visalia, and Redding were near the edges. Big satellites moved around inside that range, toggling back and forth from south to north sides. The place remained unfamiliar as doors changed, especially as the big satellites were switched up.

As the terminal got behind and as travelers were hitting the dock, the place was in disarray. Homegrown Tracy dock workers were searching for load doors, an activity that before the roll out was just second nature. They were accustomed to being so familiar with the place that a big satellite load door wasn't even worth thinking about, their work behavior was automatic for heavy points. But every door change made the place less and less familiar. Oakland (889) and Sacramento (809) were getting tossed about frequently. That frequency of change was troublesome because it kept the terminal strange, especially as more and more strange faces appeared on the dock, and more and more strange names appeared on the computer. Bill control suffered.

I reconciled bays every shift that I worked, and I was seeing some record setting examples of freight still showing bayed up within the computer, but freight not physically in the bay, freight long gone, hopefully on its way or already at the correct destination. This might not be a concern, but for those workers paying attention to the operation, a bad bill control problem had become critical. And please excuse the expression, but some of these numbers were jaw dropping. I literally saw a foreman's jaw drop when he pulled up a few Oakland bays upon the computer at the tower. The bays were both empty of freight, not a stitch, and that emptiness was right in his line of sight. But the computer showed 19 bills in one bay, 21 bills in the other. 40 bills altogether that we had lost track of. I had never seen any numbers that high. For me, it was all completely unprofessional. Those of us reconciling the bays were aware of it. Moving Oakland around during the rollout was taking a toll on maintaining responsible bill control. Whether Oakland doors were in the even side 80's, or in the odd side 70's, or were placed far away heading down near the horseshoe, all if it was bad. The engineers kept the dockworkers guessing. It was also a surefire way to keep bill control at a very low standard.

And those two terminals, Oakland (889) and Sacramento (809), were amongst those satellites that suffered the most. And it shouldn't be a mystery why. They were two of the heaviest load doors within the entire terminal. Freight coming off inbound strips were constantly going to those two doors. Tonnage is tonnage, it doesn't lie, especially when it keeps coming. When (889) and (809) appeared outside of the range of the

inbound operation, there were bound to be load problems. There were bound to be more bill control problems. There was bound to be a lack of responsible supervision. There was bound to be lost travel time for everyone stripping Oakland and Sacramento shipments from inbound strip trailers. By setting Oakland and Sacramento in far parts of the terminal, the engineers had stretched out the inbound operation like an accordion.

Apparently, they just couldn't make up their minds. Another door set up had emerged. Suddenly Oakland was loading in the 34-door with an adjacent backup, and Sacramento was loading in the 28-door with an adjacent backup. The inbound operation was now far away on the other side of the forklift fleet and the stairwell leading down to the main breakroom. Oakland and Sacramento were set far away from those strips that were set within inbound strip doors, doors set within the 70's, the 80's, the 90's, and the 100's. It was time to burn a little bit of extra propane. It was time to tack on some additional forklift mileage. It was time to take workers out of the normal range of their operation. It was time to force workers to drive far away so that they could lose their productive value with each wayward handling, each shipment going to Oakland and Sacramento. Because in the end, they lost time each time they were carried away from their normal work area. And those two monster satellites weren't sideshow attractions like Visalia and Redding. These were the two biggest load doors Tracy had to offer.

Inbound workers now had big journeys to find Oakland and Sacramento. These far doors were consistently becoming troubleshooting projects, projects to fix, projects to rearrange, projects to identify freight, and two far off doors that needed filling and closing. But too often these areas were left unattended. They were outside the responsible range of inbound doors, and they were both frequently blowing up with freight. The sheer volume was still high, workers just had to come down from the inbound using side aisles to travel since the center aisle had disappeared mid dock. Sometimes 889 and 809 would just hang and bleed, needing a close, but far away from the operation, completely out of sight.

Subjective grade or not, these 889 and 809 loads were substandard. And the bill control was horrible. In effect, both load doors and each respective backup (4 doors in total), were losers. It was a bold trick that was fundamentally incorrect. Soon those doors would creep back into the range of the inbound operation. When the crypt had finally closed on the Tracy terminal, Oakland was in the 100, and Sacramento was in the 108.

Someone somewhere was creating unnecessary work. Someone was creating waste. Someone was making a decision that was so horrible, a decision that by design would ensure that an operation would lose production, and that others would have to work harder than they really should. Something so simple as changing a door, something so apparently insignificant, yet something with potential ramifications that are hard to measure because we might have more than 100 doors to consider. It's a profound mix of potential energy. It's a profound mix of potential loss especially if freight fundamentals like travel time, keeping operations responsibly segregated, and maintaining a work environment that remains familiar for its people in working motion, are all tossed out like they are factors without value. But Yellow Corporation tossed them out and chose to enter the strange in one of its largest terminals.

There might be some considerations that could allow some wiggle room for justification, but all of it must be considered nonsense especially if that nonsense doesn't fit into dock fundamentals. And there are minor considerations that don't factor into a 7 day a week operation. There are also temporary setups like running a mini dock, but that's a setup that might happen on the weekends, or when other operations are shut down. Then strips that are heavy with shipments going to large satellites can be placed at far points. That's a different activity. But for a normal functional inbound LTL freight operation, the biggest load doors are correctly set somewhere within the inbound operation itself. Those doors are self-contained keeping all strip travel times at a minimum. An operation can't go wrong, even if strip doors could've been plugged more effectively. Those big load doors can fill up at a rapid rate. They need to always be accessible and familiar. They also need to remain second nature and (preferably) in full view by everyone within a large inbound

operation. They are never thrown into a black hole. And they aren't monkeyed with, unless of course the operation is just looking to create waste.

Placing Sacramento and Oakland at far points in the terminal (in effect, cutting them away from the inbound operation) prompted the usual questions during this rollout activity of door-peek-a-boo. Why take our two largest load points (load points that our operation should be built around) and segregate them? Why increase worker forklift travel time to such a degree? What's the benefit? Why tack on that mileage? And that's what it was, Yellow's engineering gift to the inbound crew was wasteful mileage. Why stretch out the entire operation? Why take the operation which usually had an edge around the staircase at the 70 door and extend it all the way down to the even 20's? Why would a terminal make their employees less efficient by increasing wasteful travel time? And make no mistake, Oakland (889) and Sacramento (809) were absolute monster satellite terminals! Strippers on the inbound end, wherever those strip trailers were set, would be stuffed with that freight. There was no avoiding it. The business communities that those terminals serviced were large areas. They had big business districts. The inbound strip volume for those two destinations was intense. Instead of a hop-skip-and-a-jump, forklift drivers were forced to travel long distances to load or bay up their freight, time and time again. What kind of process is that? Yellow wanted to play the freight accordion and stretch it all the way out with its biggest satellites. What a tune! It was an incorrect song with bad notes all over it. If managers play it long enough, it can help run a company right out of the freight business. Forklift travel time is important especially if a worker must drive additional yards because of false door placements. To travel several additional doors within a stretched out operation can take a toll on production especially if a door sits grossly outside its own operation. Within a cross-dock strip to stack model, far off door placements can quickly amount to poor results. It can also amount to hasteful work behaviors. If a strip trailer on the inbound end has several shipments to far off misplaced load doors, then depending on where that strip trailer is set, and where that stack trailer is set, that poor door placement will not only have a profound effect on individual performance, but on whole shift production especially if all workers are faced with the same design problem. Basically, the whole operation has been needlessly stretched out. Something so

innocent looking as lost yardage and weak door placements can't be justified. By design, inbound operations need to remain tight. Heavy load doors need to be set, fixed, and understood by all shifts.

Did Yellow want to experiment and rewrite inbound fundamentals? This rollout period wasn't the time to experiment. It was the time to keep operations tight, segregated, and efficient. Instead, Yellow chose to mix the whole thing up and spread work around the terminal on an incorrect basis. The inbound was compromised with load door absurdities. And it was pock marked with city traps and outbound load doors. The inbound was already stretched out before the 889/809 accordion stretch. The inbound was already riddled with unrelated doors that didn't belong. Those doors should be (by design) reserved for strip trailers which keep the operation exclusive and tight. Every single door is critical. And Tracy had monster inbound satellites to consider, load doors that would get hammered with shipments all day and all night. Those doors needed their own close-to-home specific spaces, spaces that drew in close-to-home stripping activity. And the more central those relationships were, the better. The effort should be to place strips which are heavy with certain destinations near those destinations. Strip placement often isn't perfect, and that's okay so long as the whole operation remains tight, segregated, and familiar to the crew.

Of course, we are left with a question. Was Yellow sabotaging the operation? We were already asking this while we were still in business. But we really didn't know. How could we know? We just knew that the company was always trying some new door configuration. Many of these door placements were irresponsible, bold, and far out. They were incorrect because they did not work.

If the place was getting monkey wrenched, think of the waste involved. Think about all of the wasted motion which (by design) had to happen. Think about the power of incessant door change especially within a large facility. Think about all of the loss of potential energy. Think about the business malevolence it would take to offer labor a long succession of incorrect door placements, and to continue to rig a computer (a computer that all dock workers will follow) knowing full well that results will not only

be grossly inefficient, but in the end will be bottom-line-poor. Think about what type of business culture it would take to knowingly design an erroneous model (a completely compromised dock working environment), then to proceed to offer that model to its labor force and pass it off as standard operating procedure. To go in with that type of intention is nothing more than a multi-faceted lie.

Think about what a massive leak in the payroll actually looks like. Think about the damage that one single person can do by designing and/or approving a false directive. Think about all the money that went right down the drain, wages that were given to people who (through their engineering failures) were hurting the company on a very hidden basis. In effect, that's what they were doing; they were hurting the company while getting paid to do so. Meanwhile, in stark contrast, other people were giving the job a legitimate effort. Yellow Freight was becoming less secure because of the foul behavior of others. It really is some profound corporate bullshit. Its totality is hard to fathom. Its wholeness is impossible to calculate because something was becoming more and more grotesque everyday that went by. And what is sad is the fact that it didn't have to be that way.

The Tracy doors were just another tool. And if their gross misplacements were in any way intentional, then how can anyone outside of 813 make sense of it? They can't.

## 8 | Trust the Process

One afternoon just before the end, a meeting was requested for all dock personnel. Some big shots were ready to give their message and to discuss the big roll-out. Workers gathered in front of the main dock office just above the ramp next to the dock pick up area. The dock was shut down, all motors were off. Then the talking began. I looked at many of my peers who I had known for many years, guys I had become very familiar with, a few of whom I could trust entirely. I already knew that some of them didn't care anymore. The company had already lost them. Some men had come to the end of their tether, and they were done listening. Trust was gone. And in Tracy, this had become a herd of guys. Some within that herd were in attendance.

But there were others. Some workers in Tracy were still listening. Believers were still in the mix. I had listened to them over and over during work hours, and I made a point of not stepping on their hopes. We had new employees as well as a big recent influx of Reddaway people. They had to be respected. Several guys were still crossing their fingers despite all the news, despite all the rumors. They were holding out. So, the place wasn't completely shrouded in skepticism. Maybe some good news was coming. Maybe we'd get something good to hold on to. Maybe this meeting might have something real to communicate. Maybe they were figuring it out, getting us back on track. And maybe not.

I wasn't alone in knowing how to read the dock jungle. The operation was communicating something completely different to a few of us. We already knew what to expect. The rollout design wasn't going to change. We knew that Yellow was committed to it. We could expect to see more and more bad loads coming in, and more and more bad loads going out. There was no longer anything special about this place.

There was nothing here to take pride in.

Tracy had become a bad load creator, almost overnight. No more blaming other terminals. We couldn't point fingers at 830, at 309, at 422, and at 135. Those days were long gone. Too many outbound loads generated by 813 were rough creations, real low-level stuff. We had a new process in place. We had workers turning into computer-following-drones, we had other workers becoming more and more aloof, we had runners getting high cross dock numbers, many of them doing nothing more than compounding outbound load problems. We also had high impact workers out of position, workers not adding their significant touches to the outbound operation on any meaningful level. The engineers had worked their special magic. What emerged was a vast mix of ugly looking LTL puzzles. Many of them closed, hooked, and headed out. It might be amusing to those types of people, the people behind the lens, but for the dock workers who had to deal with bad loads, reworks, damaged freight, and a poorly fashioned work environment, it was bad entertainment. There was nothing professional about it. No doubt we were keeping other terminals busy with our twisted creations. In Tracy, the process of stripping out bad loads from other terminals sure did keep us busy. It was some real job security.

Maybe it would all change. We were about to be addressed by the eyes and ears of Yellow Corporation, people who were responsible for the condition of the company, paid recipients who were helping drive the train, people connected to other people who made all the final decisions. Maybe they were here to share. Maybe there was some positive news. Maybe the rumor mill could be shut down for a while. Maybe there was some medicine for this madness. Maybe the ugliness we were experiencing wasn't ugly at all, maybe the future was bright at Yellow. That all these loans and all these carriers that were bought were getting ready to pay off in a big way. Maybe the vision, whatever it was, was finally getting ready to bear fruit.

So, I settled into the crowd. Soon the discussion began, and the message was delivered. We needed to "Trust the process." For now, we need to keep making turns,

and we need to keep in process. And remember, we need to trust the process. This process eventually would get rolled out nationwide. And that was it. Everything forward was just another variation of the same message. That all of us need to trust the process. We need to stay in process. We need to keep making turns.

Of course, they mentioned that now, with all of us living in the age of Amazon, customers want their freight yesterday. So, we need to be at our best and we need to trust the process, we need to keep making turns, and we need to stay in process. During this presentation I considered the zero substance of all words hitting the air. Making turns? Really? Whether a trucking firm is an LTL giant or a just mom and pops meat delivery service, turns are just a feature. A truck is on the street. At some point, a turn is required. No matter what the scenario, turns always exist whether a driver is just a block away, is down at the railyard, is in Jackson Hole, is in Grants Pass, or is in Kettleman City. Even if he hops into a different tractor, even if he gets a nice nap, or a good night's sleep, a turn is coming. At some point, a driver heads for home. So, making a turn, and staying in process told me absolutely nothing, other than the orator had just wasted an allotment of time, it was empty talking space, and one more opportunity to deliver their main message, "Trust the process." And that curveball kept coming. They reiterated these three words over and over. Staying in process and making turns was added for flavor. And that's all it was. This fine vision, a real meat and potatoes communication, was the substance of the meeting. This was the big Yellow vision. We needed to stay in process, we needed to make turns, and we needed to trust the process.

As the mouths kept repeating their message, I pushed the words aside. My focus was more on looking at faces, whether the face was familiar or not. I knew the mood of the place; I found it oddly quiet. Not that I was expecting some dissident voices, but there was little push back to this hollow message. I mean there was nothing being communicated here which carried value. Nothing at all.

I did see the usual skeptics. I knew them well. They were from the tribe who had made concessions, who had already given back to the company, men who the union

had turned their backs on by walking away from the pension table. These men conceded all of it for what? So Yellow could stay in process? So Yellow could buy more trucking companies and assume more loans? Much of the mood here was like a tired collection of eyes, an assortment of long drawn off expressions, unyielding, and buying little at this stage.

I scanned other faces in the crowd. As more and more of the trust-the-process-jive kept hitting the air, nobody looked impressed, nobody looked like they even wanted to be here. Some guys looked on without any interest whatsoever.

Now more than ever, what Yellow Corporation really needed was one giant enema. But did it even have enough steam left to have a systemwide open forum, a platform of sharing ideas and concerns aimed at getting better, with fixing things, and with acting responsibly? In Tracy, the sample size to the roll-out was plenty big enough. And the results were ugly. The damage was obvious. The rollout significantly contributed to major setbacks in areas such as load quality, cube capacity, and ensuring freight integrity. Stray freight and damage should have been a dire concern at this stage. Someone in the corporation should have been shouting, “*Stop!*”

Instead, Yellow wanted to keep going down this weird road, to keep going with this big rollout, to trust the process, and to go with this complex and finely detailed plan of making turns and staying in process. The company was showing its hand with some meaningless language, some soothsaying corporate bullshit not geared for positive change. Why encourage poor performance? If what you are doing as a business is lousy, why keep going with it? Who benefits from that? The whole thing was mind numbing. It prompted me to reflect on another meeting where the talk was similar, where the language contained no substance, where a word was hammered into us like it was some divine business elixir, and where reality was sidestepped.

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One evening many years ago, just after the Yellow/Roadway dovetail in Tracy, a newly formed graveyard crew gathered downstairs in a small conference room bunker under the dock. Men studied one another. The Roadway crowd had just invaded the Yellow Tracy terminal. Seniority came with a special value, and it was on full display with the mish-mashing of two large communities. There would be much to figure out. There were new schedules, new bids, new commutes, new carpools, new people to work around, and new working protocols. The mood tonight was pensive and reserved despite the room being stuffed with workers. It was standing room only. Then a big shot dropped in, and he began to talk.

And then it started. Yellow and Roadway were now one company, and with that combination some new synergies had arrived. There were synergies here, and there were synergies there. The whole meeting was filled with this one word, synergies. It was regurgitated repeatedly. This mouth that was connected to the corporate side of the company reminded the audience that by bringing Roadway and Yellow together and by joining forces, new synergies would be everywhere. These synergies were going to take the company in a new direction. YRC was going to turn the corner as a business. We had a new brand name now, a three-letter acronym that would be instantly recognizable to customers everywhere. YRC was here to stay. And there was excitement to all these new synergies.

The meeting itself was just a hammer down of a single word. And after all the hustling and repetition of one damn word, the corporate mouth walked out of the room and the meeting concluded. The place was still. Workers continued to look around. The room remained quiet. Questioning faces communicated that it must be time to walk upstairs and go to work. One guy from Yellow who had been leaning against a wall the whole meeting finally broke the silence with a loud rebuff, and a few workers laughed it off. Other workers sat there just shaking their heads. Some guys fidgeted, but nobody was quick to get up. Nobody was quick to talk about it. Maybe the subject matter was beyond us. Maybe I was wrong in assessing the mood of the room, besides I didn't know everybody here. The faces I was studying remained skeptical, some were stewing with a quiet anger, and others were still looking around the room waiting for

someone else to talk. The place wasn't even adjusted yet. The whole seniority roster had just changed, many of the men tonight knew nothing about the other guy next to him other than he was from Yellow or Roadway, and now we were all forced to work in Tracy. This would be our new home, for better or worse.

Why would anyone here be concerned with the notion of synergies, whatever it means? It was just a word thrown about a room, and other than a brief mention of a weird rebrand, nothing tangible was placed around this word. Synergies as a rhetorical tool, was not only completely inappropriate, but it was also an insult. The mouth should've been concerned with where he was at, and what type of audience this was. These men were concerned about their wages, about their pensions, about their new commute, about their carpool, about having a decent bid, and about potential layoffs. An opportunity existed to address real concerns. There was a room full of people who were trying to roll with the sudden change. But the mouth went the way of synergies. And the simple fact was the men in the conference room didn't really give a shit about synergies. This evening, Yellow should've left the idea of synergies to the metaphysical community, to professors and deans of business schools, to those who participate in think tanks, to those who conduct workshops, to those individuals who are highly educated, and to those people who understand its real meaning and its real power. But to throw around this word on an evening like this? To offer this word up like it was some heal-all explanation for all the recent Yellow business meddling was a foul ball. The corporation was causing a lot of headaches for real workers in motion, workers that had to respond to all the new changes, changes that hadn't been good for them. Jobs were disappearing. Jobs were losing their value. Seniority rosters were changing in big ways. And inconveniences were everywhere. But the company had decided to communicate a single word. Synergies. It was unspecific hollow talk, pure meaningless jargon. Even if the corporation was streamlining and becoming more efficient, synergies didn't belong here tonight. The language didn't fit. It was the wrong audience. And the timing was horrible.

Now here we were again, years later, up on the dock, not in some bunker conference

room. It was the time of the big rollout. And one more final meeting to get it all straightened out. Big shots were talking to a larger audience, another blend of new faces, another post-merger operation in effect, and more of the same language, the same style, the same delivery, just a few more syllables, a few more words to play with, all rolled up nice and tight. The language was the same, but the delivery came at a much more desperate hour. And after all the talk about trust, and about process, and about making turns, the meeting concluded. People turned away and returned to work.

Usually shop talk is sparked in places immediately following these meetings where there's a big visitation, when the company talks about their plans, or when the company tries to sell something to labor. But there were no gatherings of concern, no big exchange of ideas in trailers, no dock chat where forklifts pull up in groups to talk over what just happened. There wasn't a lot of buzz. It was all strange because Yellow was on the ropes, and the Tracy terminal was staggering. Maybe the workforce in Tracy was finally worn down. Maybe all the bullshit worked like a charm.

Was Yellow even worth thinking about any longer? Real Yellow people were still coming out here and giving the job a legitimate effort. They might even add a little quality to their work. But today a different element of the company was in attendance, people driving the train, different people who were connected to another community. And their message was no different than that of a person who talks about something yet says nothing meaningful at all. That process takes skill.

## 9 | The Utility Drivers, part one

*They had years to figure this thing out.  
What else is there to say?*

Within days of the big rollout, some of us knew that we had a big outbound load problem on our hands. No matter what the arguments were to the new dock layout, one item was blatant and obvious, running loads were creative messes. But there were so many new changes, and so many new happenings that it was difficult to make heads or tails of this place which had suddenly become downright odd. What we did know is that the bids had completely changed. We knew that people had moved around. We knew that swing shift had beefed up. We knew that the outbound graveyard crew had been dissolved. We knew that a big influx of regional freight workers had dovetailed into the seniority roster in Tracy. We knew that the management team was stressing cross-dock activity, and that the goal was to get everyone on the dock on a forklift and get them into strip trailers, and for all of us to work independently. We knew that traditional looking load zones had gotten torn apart. We knew that odd and unrelated doors were appearing next to one another. We knew that the inbound and outbound operations were strangely blended. We knew that dayshift was walking into running outbound loads that were completely out of control. We knew that the horseshoe had become a disaster area. We knew that there were vast assortments of outbound loads that were gross aberrations. We knew that the company was setting up several doors on the far edge of the inbound dock for a big collection of out-of-house workers who were bringing their own strips to work here in Tracy. Change, for better or worse, was here. And despite all opinions to what was happening, there were a handful of people who quietly agreed that if the loads didn't quickly improve on an outbound basis, that Yellow would be in big trouble as a business. This ugly thing might even run us out of business.

We did have experienced men on the dock, men who weren't on board with the

creation of outbound jumbled messes. We knew that we couldn't morph into a carrier that was satisfied with this working style. Nor could we send those types of outbound trailers deep into the Yellow system of terminals. Freight keeps the lights on. Each shipment, each bill, no matter if it was a winner or a loser, no matter how it was priced, no matter how it was configured, and no matter whether it was worth our time or not, there were customers behind these shipments. If the whole collection of Yellow freight was weak, that wasn't our concern as freight handlers because that's another department. Whether it pays or not, the freight must be tendered a certain way and it must be pushed into the system a certain way. But there clearly was no safety mechanism in place. It was missing with this new rollout design. The previous standard of doing what we could on an initial handling basis upon the outbound had been twisted somehow, something was awry because the loads were awry. They were building poorly, that much was obvious. We were suddenly exposed and wide open to failure.

We knew that freight was our lifeblood. We disagreed often about loading specifics, we were all different, each senior dock worker had a different style. We knew who could effectively load on the outbound, and who couldn't. But no matter who was doing what, all the adults knew that every single shipment needed to be adequately loaded and safely worked in with respect to maintaining trailer cube. These loads were going deep into the Yellow system. And cube always had to be respected. There had to be a standard respective of the next terminal. But with this new rollout, some workers were admitting that we couldn't protect the outbound loads anymore. It prompted a simple question. How long were we going to last? The question had merit. Were we in the freight business, or not? If we were in the freight business, then we better start acting like it.

We knew what we were looking at. The trailers didn't lie. The pictures of closed loads might lie. But the wild mix of freight within the trailers that were against the dock, those outbound trailers that were still loading, too many of them were unhealthy mixes of freight. And it couldn't be denied. These creations weren't going to take us very far as a business. Some of us were sure of it. What we weren't sure of was how these ugly loads were forming.

Just after the Reddaway dovetail there was an awareness that many of the Reddaway workers fell short of outbound loading requirements. Collectively, they needed some work. And they needed plenty of instruction. Some people did in fact urge them to slow down occasionally, and to think about what they were doing with some of these specific loads, and to work freight in on a responsible basis, with logistic bars and dunnage, while keeping to simple rules such as light on heavy stacking. But there was no effective transition, the communities were simply mish mashed. Even with this weird influx of regional freight workers, so many other things were happening. With all the alterations to the dock, so much of the terminal was now foreign. The rebid had moved around so many workers. New faces were everywhere. Initially, it was difficult to make sense of many of the comings and goings of dock workers. The work environment had completely changed.

The whole set up was a new strangeness, a helplessness that placed us at a huge disadvantage. Tracy was too big, and it ran 24 hours a day. Add the fact that the terminal had strange door placements, outbound load doors were being stretched out all over the dock, from the horseshoe all the way down to the edge of the city operation. By outbound design, there was too much space to cover. Senior dock working talent couldn't do much to remedy the problem, if a worker could even be bothered by it at all. Our job was to get handed strips, and to follow computer prompts. Besides, a coherent looking outbound was gone. And 813 was big! So why bother? And with that scattering of outbound load doors, and with the disappearance of load zones, some big players were losing interest in doing their usual quality thing, of maintaining load integrity. For years, they had prided themselves with it. But now, the outbound operation (what remained of it) had become distorted. It wasn't designed for effective load maintenance, too many regional doors were spread out through the whole operation, even past the inbound operation, all the way to the edge of the city. It was a disorganized collection of outbound load doors which in placement wasn't encouraging worker stack side participation. Nobody was in the mood to travel the whole operation just to fix outbound loads, just to fix the collective poor workings of others. With the cross-dock

directive being stressed, and more and more urgent behaviors transforming more and more outbound loads, some senior workers were just taking strips and blending in. And some of those dock workers were the terminal's best outbound puzzle builders.

The outbound hybrid was gone. Without it, all quality assurance was gone because senior experience was gone. And with that change, senior day shift had no effective way to connect with the previous shift. The rollout had a new way of doing things at Yellow. Now, with the creation of more and more poor outbound loads which were filling on a massive basis, dayshift dock workers were walking into this stuff. The ugly visual of starting work and seeing load door after load door of thrown in messes was real. It kept happening, and there was nothing in place to suggest that it was going away. More troubling, the rollout design was also helping to create backlog. The yard wasn't lying. It was filling up with old trailers and we were getting behind.

All of it was concerning. But what did we really know? We knew for a fact that we were faced with an ogre of a problem. Too many loads were running poorly, they were substandard messes, completely unacceptable. And for tenured outbound dock workers, it was a stark contrast. Yellow Freight was effectively a thing of the past because there was a loss of responsible freight control. This thing, whatever this thing was, was out of our hands. We knew that trailers were getting cut, and schedules were being made. The management team had the responsibility to close all outbound trailers. That was no longer our job requirement. Yellow had taken that responsibility out of our hands several years before the rollout. Yellow wanted pictures of closed loads, and they wanted managers to control it. So, it was anybody's guess what the trailers looked like that were being closed away from the eyes of experienced dock workers. Many of the happenings were past our range of vision. Despite the feeling that the terminal was getting away from us, we did have two things in our favor. We had plenty of dock working experience. And we had computers mounted on our forklifts.

We had to start with investigating the doors. Of course, each load told a story. The computer told a story as well. Outbound door after outbound door had trouble spots.

And with loads receiving volumes of freight, loads could fill quickly and on a poor running basis. Upon entering a load door, a dock worker might be asking a different type of question because of the abnormal construction that he was facing. It's a bad load and he knows it. Now what does he do with his piece of freight? Does he load it and compound the problem? He'll get the scan which is a minor success. And he can quickly get back to his trailer to keep stripping at a high clip. However, the trailer is screaming rework. Does he invest time in reworking this thing? Or does he simply bay up his shipment(s) because of the obvious loaded mess he's faced with? Those are the options. If the area is blown up, he could start loading, but that's not the directive. He was handed a strip like too many other cross-dock participants. So, what's the easy thing to do? The easy thing to do is to quickly load the shipment, get the full scan, and get back to the strip trailer. That's what the company wants. That's the directive. Each worker handles that directive differently. They make different decisions. The inexperienced dock worker will often make an easy decision. The experienced dock worker might also make an easy decision because he is faced with other questions. What kind of day does he want to have within this dysfunctional place? It's a much different question. Different people ask different questions, they also make different decisions. A daytime decision might be much different than a nighttime decision. The community of workers has changed. And with the new rollout, nighttime decisions (freight behaviors) might be based on what the directive encourages. A nighttime participant might be asking himself, what kind of night does he want to have while working in this big new unfamiliar place? He knows that he needs to get back to his strip trailer. And he knows that he will have to get back on the road in a little bit. This really isn't his home. In effect, he's just visiting. And that visitor, through his working style might be having a profound effect on the whole operation.

It's not the responsibility of dock workers to cover the poor workings of other dock workers. That fixing-the-workings-of-others-activity can get old very quickly. Some dock workers avoid it altogether. It's not their duty. Workers shouldn't have to deal with the inadequacies of other workers around them. They shouldn't have to correct their behaviors time and time again. A bad load is a lot of work. It's a lot of work as an

in-house rework. It's a lot of work if there are vast successions of poor running loads because massaging in a shipment will take some additional time and effort. And that's just a single shipment to load or bay up. And it's a lot of work at the next terminal if that poorly loaded trailer is ultimately closed. No matter what the scenario, real people will have to cover for other people if the job of loading an outbound trailer is done by belligerent, inexperienced, or ineffective others. Loads that collect poorly fitted pieces add up on a negative basis. If not corrected, those loads become aberrations. And those aberrations can be handed off shift to shift.

In rollout Tracy, dockworkers were walking into outbound load nightmares. And with that new aspect shoved into their new work environment, what were the real options available to seasoned outbound dock workers? To arrive at work and know that load after load will have to be torn apart, to be fixed, and to be worked up? Maybe some of these aberrations would just be closed, sealed, and sent. Whatever the scenario, some of us within days of the big rollout were taking a step back. We admitted that we had a few problems. Problem number one was the fact that at this stage, management was worthless. They were pushing this new crap. And that's what it was. It was the encouragement of crappy looking loads that were building beyond our control. We were walking into this crap. And bad loads were always a problem at Yellow, but this was next level stuff. It wasn't coming anywhere close to previous standards. In the past we did have some weak periods. But this new rollout was a whole different animal. Maintaining adequate cube within outbound load doors had been shattered.

We were the people handling the freight, and all the sudden our outbound loads stunk. There it was, easily identifiable. Trailer after trailer, right in front of us. We knew they were bad because we knew the difference between a fine load and a poor load. We could compare this new ugliness to a previous outbound Tracy load standard.

Was this the freight business or not? These trailers were visibly ugly. And fresh workers were walking into this bad horde. And that certainly wasn't any responsible way to start a shift. And it was no illusion. Suddenly we had some completely

substandard constructions within our outbound loads. And what was also frightening about it was that no alarms were going off. Other than those dock workers who were complaining about it, the management team remained silent, whereas in the past they would have been putting a stop to much of the bad load building behavior even if most of it was happening late in the evening or during the early hours of the morning. But this was a new process. And people were on board with this process. They had set it up. This was their baby.

The whole thing was too strange. No matter where Yellow was going with this thing, I had decided that managers (whether I liked them or not) had to be kept at arm's length. In effect, they were fully compromised. But more important than that, the outbound loads had been compromised, and that was the real problem. And if this thing was going to continue, day after day, week after week, without proper adjustment, then how does an individual dock worker handle it, especially a senior dock worker who has some outbound working chops? Some workers had deemed this thing incorrect, even very early on. To them, Yellow was in error. Do those workers just play along with it? And if they do play along with it, then for how long? Until the wheels come off of the place? How does this new ugliness affect work behavior? Other than complaining about it, what are the options? And what can you do when someone (or something) is ransacking your house?

Those outbound loads, and the contents of those loads, kept the lights on. And we knew that they kept the lights on. Again, we inherently knew that adequate cube was revenue, and adequate cube within outbound loads had been altered. It was alarming, and there was a mood that suggested that we might be running out of time. So, time was of the essence. It was time to pay attention. It was time to get off your fucking phone all night long. It was time to get sharp. And it was time to do an investigation. Even if we couldn't protect the loads, we could try to understand how they were growing on an ineffective basis hour by hour. Where did that ugliness come from? How were these loads forming? What were the contributing factors? Who, if anybody, was responsible? And before we would ever get to some real finger pointing, what did we really know?

We knew that the outbound loads (as a whole collection) were substandard messes. We knew that there were new directives. We knew that a large dovetail had made significant changes to the seniority roster and that the bids had been altered. We knew that doors were appearing in odd places and within other operations. We knew that the preexisting outbound graveyard crew had been obliterated. We knew that the inbound graveyard crew was still functional and still intact. We knew that Yellow wanted us to be a bunch of good little soldiers, to be independent cross-dock performers, workers that follow computer prompts, workers who run high cross dock percentages, and workers that would get back to their own trailers in order to do it all over again. We also knew that besides the Reddaway blend, there was another new community of workers bringing their own work here at night. They were given doors to plug their trailers and work their freight. They were taking up space and they were filling up space.

Trailer after trailer told the same story. Almost all the graveyard names that a dock worker would expect to find listed on the outbound loads were gone. And there was another problem. Where were the dayshift names, the usual guys who clean the place up? Most of those names were gone as well. There were a few names of junior graveyard workers who had been here a few years. There were a few Reddaway names attached to these trailers. I had been studying the new names on the seniority roster, I knew where these workers fit in even early on, I just couldn't attach faces to most of them yet. And there were a few senior day shift workers who had added to these mixes, especially on the later sections of trailer. But collectively, all those names weren't heavy on the construction of these outbound aberrations. On the computer, a big collection of new names had appeared, and these new names were listed all over these bad loads.

The Reddaway crowd was a different problem. We would have to get to know these workers eventually. They had all gotten absorbed, and they were trying to fit in somewhere within the operation. And because most of them were junior, they settled into swing shift and graveyard bids. There were new bids posted, whole bids were abolished, new bids were created, and bumping was going on all over the place. But

most of the Reddaway dock workers were initially aiming at swing shift and late swing shift bids. They were quickly thrown into the Yellow mix, and upon the dock many of us were still trying to figure them out. We knew very early that they had regional habits, and that several of them needed some serious outbound training.

Early in the rollout, the horseshoe was especially troubling. Bad outbound loads were all over the dock because of the inbound and outbound blend, but the trailers that ran from the even side 20's, to the teens, to the northeast elbow, to the single digits, to the southeast elbow, to the odd side teens, and to the odd side 20's were collectively a destructive horde of outbound loads. A few loads might be considered passable, satisfactory at best. But the rest of the doors set for loading and that had filled at least to the half were unavoidable eye sores. These were flat F's. And even though I wasn't a witness to how they were constructed, I gave them an F for effort because it doesn't take much effort to just carelessly load freight into a load door. With no obvious standard to meet, anyone with the ability to operate a forklift could've loaded these things. The only hope for many of these loads was the possibility that somebody on day shift would spend some time pulling them apart and doing some reworks. That activity is a waste of time because it should have never happened in the first place. It's an activity that can quickly get out of hand and put the terminal in a predicament. It's one thing to have a backlog of inbound trailers to strip, it's quite another to have satellite trailers building up in the yard, trailers needing to be stripped and arranged accordingly into outbound load doors. Yellow was failing to meet its obligation to all shippers. The product was there, but the quality was missing.

A hard grade was due because there were people and businesses paying for Yellow Freight service, and that service (if not guaranteed) should come with an assurance that the carrier is doing its best to ensure the integrity of shipments (meaning all shipments, and every customer no matter who they were). But Yellow wasn't about doing its best. Its best was long gone, and that long gone aspect was coming into sharp focus. This new design was essentially forcing workers to act a certain way, it was steering them around in a wayward fashion. The directives within that design were specific. They could be

identified. And now suddenly, the new Yellow was adept at the creation of aberrant outbound loads, loads that floundered, loads that failed to meet a checklist of normal outbound requirements.

Assessing the participants would come eventually. Real people were contributing to these poor loads. But the problem was too large. The Tracy terminal was too damn big. The poor loads had to be considered as a whole collection; a whole collection that was being profoundly affected by a new rollout design. Within that design was a cross-dock directive in combination with new participants working that directive. These two new variables were factoring hard into the construction of a vast collection of poor running loads. And what was truly troubling to this new design was this fact: There was still too much available experience within the Tracy seniority roster for these loads to reach poor levels. It would have been a simple adjustment.

Yellow Tracy had reached a poor stage. And knowing this, I was determined to get a grasp on this thing. But first came the load assessment, the raw grade. Grading people would come later, first these loads needed grading. As a collection of outbound loads, they were raunchy, especially in certain areas of the dock. Those raunchy loads were the worst outbound loads that I'd ever seen in all my freight working tenure. And that raunchiness was being passed off to other workers on other shifts. It might not have been a concern if it was only a few trailers, but it was outbound door after outbound door of bad mixes, uneven areas, open pockets, freight stacked in peril, items unsecured all over the place, lack of dunnage, lack of logistic bars, and clear damage to new freight within growing loads, loads that hadn't even got on the road yet. And this was early in the process, these loads weren't even pushed deep into the system yet. Other terminals would have to strip these ugly creations unless these raunchy looking trailers would become reworks right here in Tracy. In summation, the terminal was now in the business of creating substandard outbound trailers. The collection of loads was deserving of an F. The Tracy terminal was also deserving of an F. The whole thing was backwards, completely against the grain of responsible outbound loading practices. The joke was that smoke was coming off of 813. But that joke wasn't funny anymore. Within

any endeavor, to give yourself an F is serious business especially if you know exactly what you are looking at.

What was this ugly thing? And what was so inviting about it? If reworks become standard operation procedure, then a terminal has a big problem. But nothing in Tracy was getting rectified. And where were the adults who should have been discussing it? What was Yellow Corporation really pushing? Who was engineering this cube building nightmare scenario? A small collection of dock workers might be discussing it, but collectively we were helpless at this stage. Dock workers do what they are told. That's what they do. They are assigned work. They follow directives. They follow their computer. And they stay busy.

Suddenly, Yellow Corporation had placed new communities of people on the dock. And management stressed a cross dock strip to stack directive, and it wasn't working because the dock working collective activity was becoming detrimental to achieving adequate cube within outbound loads. And this wasn't happening within a few doors. It was happening on a massive basis. It couldn't be denied even if the terminal was devoid of adults, even if nobody was standing up to address the real problem of bad loads. Now, a flurry of foreign electronic signatures were all over the place. We were looking at those names. Their participation was heavy. A new working style had emerged in Tracy. Effective outbound cube within load trailers had suddenly fallen apart. If that's not cause and effect, then what is?

It wasn't the right time to shrug our heads and drive off bitching about the lack of quality going into these messes, although several workers were doing just that. It was time to pull up loads and identify what was happening. Several senior men saw this thing for what it was. And it was discussed at length. But because of the size of terminal 813, and the way the whole dock had been blended, there wasn't much we could do about it, unless a worker was going to invest his own time to drive all around the terminal and work on fixing bad loads, to back strip shipments and work them back in safely (with cube in mind) so they could ride. Some men did take time doing it. But that

activity could get old fast even for senior men who were normally proactive. They weren't here to cover for the inadequacies of Yellow's engineers. And they couldn't realistically cover that type of ground. Remember, a distinct looking outbound had been torn apart and spread out all over the terminal. There were distant people in charge of this thing, a thing that some of us knew was pure waste. What we could complain about was the stench of bad engineering. But who wants to hear that?

Of course, it didn't take long for us to figure out who all these participants were. Even if we couldn't see them, and even if we couldn't witness their activity, with some simple investigation, we knew who was doing it. Some of us knew this jungle. We knew who belonged, and who didn't. There were new people working here called utility drivers. They walked into this place during graveyard hours, and they disappeared during graveyard hours. They brought in their own work, they worked it on the Tracy dock, and they added to outbound loads. The overall outbound participation was now different. It was a different type of heavy participation within a small work window. And because of the size of that activity, it was beyond us. The change to outbound load quality was radical.

Yellow employees or not, utility drivers were foreign participants while on the Tracy dock. They were out-of-house workers that effectively outsourced in-house dock worker participation within high impact areas. They were not only working their own satellite freight on the Tracy dock, but they were working shipments into trailers on a massive and ineffective basis, thereby destroying the terminal's ability to maintain cube on an outbound effective basis. The poor running loads were in plain sight. The computer screen wasn't lying. Even though we couldn't see their behavior (those of us on day shift and swing shift couldn't directly witness the activity), we were able to see the names who participated in the construction of these loads. Shipments could be tracked to origin terminals and the driver who worked that freight into each load. But all those participants were gone, they had left the building hours before day shift had arrived. There was no real connection. But severe damage had been done. The operation was bequeathed a deep gash on a late night basis and the sheer volume of it was too much.

And as the sun hit the dock, managers might seal these aberrations up, they might keep them filling, or they might throw around some band aids and call for some back strips. In the end, bad hands were all over the product.

Tracy was becoming unfamiliar because the working style was unfamiliar. Outbound load quality was absent in too many places. And this whole collection screamed failure. These new constructions were bottom feeder bullshit, loads a minimum wage workforce could put together. And whether we as individual dock participants were a part of it or not, we had to admit that 813 had a lousy outbound operation. Too many outbound loads stunk, plain and simple. If this was the future at Yellow Freight, then how long could we keep this up? Something would have to give.

There were other frightening aspects to this new strange place. Several times I had arrived for a noon start (two hours early on a swing bid) and there wasn't a high impact worker in sight, especially around these bad running mixes. Whereas before the rollout, at noon the place had the usual participants doing wrap up work, or just keeping the loads high and tight during busy times. The usual way that 813 had operated had been strangely altered. Now, people were obviously out of place. Too many times I noted that there was gross absenteeism, meaning a gross lack of normal participation. And that's really what it was, it was an absenteeism of responsibility, and there was an absenteeism of high impact worker participation. There was no effective connection between the shifts. It was obvious. Some of the big dogs on dayshift refused to participate, the loads were beyond them.

We knew that the graveyard outbound crew had been effectively torn apart. And we knew that a whole lot of damage to outbound running loads had been done overnight. Many of the usual outbound dogs were effectively gone. They were on other shifts, they might be participating elsewhere, and their level of outbound participation might be of the *I just don't give a shit* variety. These guys had whiskers, and the bids had changed. The work format had changed. And if senior men didn't like it, they had the seniority to move around and sign other bids when bids were posted. Overall participation was

changing as well. Not everyone was on board with this rollout, because it was like someone had turned on a faucet. And who was in the mood to drink brown water? In their own way, several of the big dogs were turning their noses up at it.

It could be argued that this raunchy rollout style was jeopardizing all our jobs. Some people might think that it shouldn't be anybody's business what the guy next to you is doing. That might be fair within a normal working atmosphere. But this whole thing had quickly become intrusive. There were poor working behaviors. And there was a pending doom that was tugging on several of us. Senior people were reacting to this thing differently. Those who were bothered by it, and those who could be bothered by what others were doing, were talking and sharing ideas. Workers were harming the operation. Some dock workers were very hip to it, and others were oblivious to it.

I wasn't policing anybody. I was however looking closely at the names of people who were involved within these trailers. So, I looked at trailer after trailer. And I kept at it. If something ugly caught my eye, I would look at it. I'd pull the trailer up on the computer and investigate. I'd study all the names who were involved. I wasn't going to step into trailers and invest my time reworking trailer after trailer, but I would investigate them. And the best place to start was right at the heart of the problem, to directly look at this vast collection of disasters, many of which were well past the half, trailer after trailer bereft of quality. And sometimes, there might not be a soul in sight where many of these outbound loads were positioned. These things sat, sometimes far away, especially if the door had been misplaced within the inbound, or on the other side of the inbound.

I knew the day shift players, and I knew their loading styles. Regardless of the Reddaway dovetail, all the old day shift workers had the juice to stay locked into day shift hours. But some of their participation was changing. Some guys were just taking strips. Some weren't heavily involved in the stack side of the operation. I knew it because their names weren't showing heavily on the computer. There was a new visual which showed a much different load participation. What did the participation really

look like?

As a consolidation center, we were supposed to be in the business of creating decent trailers of adequate and safe cube for the rest of the system to work. Now, outbound loads were indecent. And in my estimation, that indecency was jeopardizing all our jobs. So to question worker participation was very much in bounds, it was fair game. To pry into who was participating wasn't intrusive, especially if those people were corrosive to the business. If we actually cared about our jobs, it was our duty. It was also our duty because this whole thing might quickly get away from us. Places like Yellow fold.

For sure, I knew there was a big selection of foreign names attached to these bad loads. These names were showing on the computer. And these names didn't even have a number on the seniority roster in Tracy. I didn't know them. I could surmise what was happening, but that wasn't good enough. The computer could only offer a reflection of what was happening. It was time to know exactly who was doing what, and to witness directly. Who were the people directly involved with the construction of these bad outbound loads?

## The Utility Drivers, part two

When someone from management asked me if I could train some of the utility drivers, my knee-jerk reaction should have been, *Not interested* or *Get lost!* This rollout was an exclusive party of decision makers pushing weird designs and bad directives. For me, covering for the company's shortcomings was just a waste of time. Nor was I interested in training new employees, that activity was already far behind me. It had been leached out of me. When I was asked to help train some of the utility drivers, my simple reply was . . . .

“Sure.”

I didn't need to think about it. Even if training them was a complete waste of time, I could see the value of witnessing this utility driver process directly. I was now back on graveyard. And with some pre-shift overtime, I had a big work window. I could get a grasp on this whole utility driver thing, how it gets started, how it gets into gear, how it ends, and how it affects the terminal. After all, I had already decided to study these guys well before management asked me. I was working the inbound now, and I needed to find a way to get down to where utility drivers were plugging their trailers. The problem of working the inbound now went away, I could get down where I needed to be. I could get a clear view and not be bothered by anyone as I was doing it. Training just made it easier for me to assess them. I was also at a big advantage. I might not know all the particulars to this whole utility driver process, but I did know the outbound operation in Tracy. I knew that jungle through and through. I also knew what a healthy outbound operation was supposed to look like.

Occasional training away from the inbound might be exactly what I needed. I was going to satisfy my own curiosity one way or another. Was I genuinely interested in helping these guys out? Maybe a little. After all, they did need it. That much was certain. But I was on a little miniature mission, and the timing of it was almost perfect. Working with a few of them would put me in a good position to make sense of all these bad running loads that were getting handed off. I also had my own questions about Yellow's willingness to go this direction. What made these utility drivers so inviting? Why would Yellow opt for these guys instead of building on its previous outbound experience? What value did utility drivers bring to the dock? Only one way to find out.

There was a good opportunity here. I would just have to train a little bit, but not a lot. It might have been a little selfish because my main concern was to see how this whole utility driver process was unfolding on the Tracy dock. I could go down to the horseshoe and set up shop for training since that's the area where many of them were stripping from. But anywhere 20 doors east of the inbound operation would be a good vantage point to make an overall assessment. I could make individual assessments, and I could make a collective assessment. I could see how these guys were impacting the outbound loads. I could witness it directly.

I eased into it. Sometime during the week I'd find some hours to train, mixing it in here and there. A few guys needed immediate help. They were easy to spot, so I started with them. It all remained simple. I kept a list of all the names of all the utility drivers, which terminal they were coming from, and how active they were. Some new ones were getting cycled in, and others were getting cycled out. So, my list of names was changing.

I decided early on not to overextend myself and correct everything I was looking at, even if I was tempted to do so. How much time could I invest in that? This was a big invasion of low grade dock workers getting cycled in and out. Some of them didn't last very long, and more new faces were showing up. There were too many of them, and it wasn't my job to fix anything especially on a massive level. It wasn't feasible to go around and fix one thing after another, especially if a false directive was at play. I trained individually, sometimes from afar, just keeping myself accessible. If there was a new utility driver who was clearly making mistakes, I might step in. If one of them was generating a lot of stray freight or if I saw that they were misloading shipments, then I might step in. If a utility driver was prone to damaging shipments, I might step in. Or, if one of them asked for some direct assistance, then I would most likely step in. My involvement was more akin to patchwork. Also, my outbound days were over. I was working within the inbound operation, not the outbound. Nobody was asking me to go work satellite strips, nor load outbound doors. Utility driver training was away from the inbound and it was low on my list of things to do, but I would do it. I just wouldn't do it every night of the workweek. So, nothing was really scheduled. Sometimes the opportunity just had to present itself. I also had to be in the mood. However, my curiosity continued to pull me down to the doors where they were plugging their trailers. Nobody was bothering me. Nobody was asking me what I was doing. I might have to give up my motor for a few hours, but I had wide open space to take up observable stations. I could look around and see exactly what was happening.

On the dock, I didn't know anybody on the graveyard crew who was interested in training utility drivers. A few senior dock workers were willing to give up their own forklifts when the equipment was tight in order to prevent utility drivers from standing around. But training them wasn't happening. In fact, after a few tailgates we had a few

closed-door meetings to discuss the problem of utility drivers. We discussed some of their habits and several workers were adamant that they didn't want to be bothered by them.

But for myself, this lack of equipment was an opportunity. I kept a list of these new players. So, several evenings I didn't hesitate to give up my forklift. It opened up a perfect position to observe the dock workings, a correct vantage point where I could accurately assess them. I could see how they worked, how they affected other workers, and how they worked in their own satellite freight. I might lean against a checker stand, I might stand around, or I might walk around a little bit, going door to door, training a little bit here and there. But in effect, what I was really doing was directly witnessing a big-bad-significant piece within the new Yellow process. I could see exactly who was doing what. And for myself, someone who had worked the outbound for many years, it was easy to see the overall impact that these guys were having on running outbound loads inside the Tracy terminal. I had the time and the space to watch it develop. I was able to do a thorough evaluation of people and the loads that were filling. I had to be sure though, I had to see it repeatedly night after night. And I had to see that there was no end in sight to this directive. Once I knew that Yellow was completely committed to this thing, I was satisfied. My assessment was done. I kept all my findings very reserved and I privately stepped away. I disintegrated back into the inbound graveyard operation. I had seen enough.

Is it fair to grade utility drivers? Is a grade in order even if it is nothing more than a subjective grade? Absolutely it's in order because Yellow Corporation chose to go that direction. It's imperative that we compare utility drivers to the normal graveyard outbound of the past. And we need to take a large sample of that outbound past even if it was malleable, even if it was changing with different working people who drifted in and out of that previous graveyard operation.

The rollout forced several things. It saved work for a select group, and it took work away from others who were familiar with it. It broke down traditional looking work areas. It opened avenues. It allowed some workers to take easy ways out. And it gave the management team the opportunity to not keep certain adept workers within high

impact areas, areas that were gone, or areas that were scattered about. In other words, the rollout, with all its weird components, obliterated the outbound graveyard crew of the past. It also obliterated a functional looking outbound design where well defined load zones were the usual order of business.

At 813, the outbound was where the LTL freight game was at. Trailers would fill and get pushed into a hungry system of terminals, other barns that would open 813 loads, and strip them on their inbound operations. And in the past, the Tracy outbound graveyard crew had its own style. They stripped freight and they put large amounts of freight away and did so on an adequate cube basis. Come sunrise, the next shift would usually be placed in a good position. There was a normal outbound handoff between shifts even if the bid structure didn't allow them to connect. Even if the 19:30 crew had all left the building, day shift workers could gauge where the operation was at, they could see how the outbound ball was handed off. Depending on the satellite strips still in transit, or what was on hand, senior men on days could effectively aim towards wrapping the outbound. Sometimes they could wrap it, sometimes they couldn't. But it was all in sight. Senior men on days could see the handoff, and they could make sense of it, sometimes quite early in their shift especially if the work was running out. It was real simple stuff. With the rollout, much of that responsible shift to shift handoff disappeared.

The rollout had its own style. That process was adept at placing the day shift crew in a horrible position. For those running loads that were clearly visible, loads that were determined to be complete losers, a decision might be made to correct the problem. But how many outbound loads were we really looking at? And how much time (dock worker hours) was the terminal willing to invest in reworks? If the terminal was going to invest hours reworking outbound freight that had already been loaded, the chances of ever wrapping up the outbound might quickly become a pipe dream. With more and more trailers backing up, and with more and more poor running loads left behind for day shift to make decisions upon, what were the chances of ever getting cleaned up, no matter how heavy the bid, no matter how seasoned the crew?

We had a new process. And we had a new outbound style, one that fashioned loads

which were losers. And that process was in full force, it was in full stride, a process that we had to trust. Maybe this process would correct itself, maybe not. All that mattered was that in freight reality, the results of that process were collectively horrible. And finally, the outbound operation (what was left of it) was bequeathed a predicament. Too much damage had been done just hours before the day shift arrived. The dock behavior within that work window had been collectively abnormal. It amounted to a vast succession of poor loads. Now the operation was behind the 8-ball. What were their options, if any at all?

If they let a poor outbound load go, the system would pay a price. It would pay a price at the next terminal with a loss of cube, and possibly with labor hours lost since a bad load is a bad load. They're often filled with recoups, damages, and shipments that have fallen over. Those loads become labor intensive. The quality is gone. The showroom integrity is gone.

If they cleaned up several outbound loads with rework activity, it would amount to more and more handlings, and the yard would pay a price. How much time can a crew invest in reworks before something else gives? The yard had to pay a price. Backlog ensued. Eventually crews couldn't stay current, they were burning hours fixing the working behaviors of others. More old trailers filled the yard, more late freight gathered, and a decision was made to fly in travelers to get the terminal current. It was a lose-lose scenario, because one way or another, everyone paid the price.

Too many outbound loads were being crapped on. And too many big high impact players were out of position. Yellow did a nice job of breaking it all down. And with all the doors out of position, the terminal never stood a chance. It was an ugly concoction. It's amazing to think that somewhere people agreed on instituting this utility driver ingredient. The most critical work at the consolidation center was saved for people who weren't even on the Tracy seniority roster. That action is amazing! Work was saved for other people. That satellite work was placed into irresponsible hands, hands that proceeded to destroy adequate cube on a massive outbound load basis. And it all took place on a flat plane full of doors during the wee hours of the night.

Yellow Corporation didn't protect the work. Instead, they brought in a poor working grade crowd of dock workers who weren't ready yet to collectively build outbound loads. And the loads suffered. It was a false design. If building adequate cube and maintaining load integrity on an outbound basis has any LTL value, then that design basically poisoned the system. Yellow Corporation and the Teamsters Union didn't protect the value of the seniority roster in Tracy, and what that value can offer to a consolidation center that loads on a large outbound basis. A big swath of out-of-house workers were introduced to the dock in Tracy, and there were no protections. They came, they worked, they damaged loads, and they left. And without protections from that type of activity, as a consolidation center, we were helpless to do anything about it. And that directive stood in place until the end. It was never remedied. And during that whole process, Yellow Corporation failed to protect customer freight. They failed to fix a problem that they created. As Tracy dock workers, we didn't create it. And it was too big for any of us. It was way beyond us. However, we could note it. We could also put it into the work record.

Yellow went out of its way to sidestep its in-house working experience. Much of that experience added quality to outbound loads Monday through Friday during graveyard hours. That experience protected load integrity for many years. Then, Yellow created something. They made a conscious decision to make alterations on how that graveyard freight was worked. They chose to give a significant amount of graveyard work (customer freight) to a community of other workers. That process happened. It can't be denied. Their effect on maintaining load integrity might be argued, but their presence and the work given to them can't be argued. It was theirs to handle. So how did they handle the freight? Did they handle it with a new precision? Were the loads that they collectively built complete works of art? Or was the shipping community given a false impression of how their products would be handled?

With the introduction of utility drivers, could Yellow guarantee anything on a freight handling basis? Or at that rollout stage, was it just a business crap shoot? I was right there when it all unfolded. I watched it closely from beginning to end, and I studied it in depth. If Yellow was giving customers a quality assurance (customers who had to be

completely blind to how their product was being pushed through the Yellow system of terminals) then that assurance was false. The new design was detrimental to maintaining outbound load quality. With respect to that load quality, unless Yellow Corporation was completely oblivious to what was happening in Tracy, the decision to give a false impression must be considered fraudulent even if there was no connection between sales and engineering. If the shipping community was given a false impression, then how can that not be business fraud? The fact was shipments in Tracy (outbound loads filled with customer freight) were loading on a very poor basis. The collective motions of utility drivers on the Tracy dock virtually guaranteed a rash of poor running outbound loads. And it wasn't professional at all. Utility drivers were collectively years away from getting to a professional outbound level. Yet, they continued to arrive and work their own satellite freight on the dock in Tracy. They worked a significant amount of satellite freight into 813 outbound loads. That collective activity produced consistently poor results on massive levels. Freight handling quality was lost. Maintaining freight integrity was being lost. Achieving consistent one and done cube on an outbound basis was also a thing of the past. The roll-out design forced a different type of production. A strange ugliness had to happen. Too many fundamentals were missing. Too many key puzzle building ingredients were missing.

Upon a plane, trust was lost. Some of us were paying attention to what the management team was pushing hard. And we weren't buying it. We could directly see the damage to loads. And with that damage new questions came along. More trust was disappearing day after day. In some quarters, the dialogue was changing. Were customers being deceived during the entire rollout phase? If the design guaranteed poor LTL freight handling actions, and if Yellow Corporation knew it all along, then was giving any quality assurance to the business community a deceitful action? In other words, did Yellow Corporation already know that by their own design shipments would be tendered on a poor handling basis on the dock in Tracy?

We ask those questions because as dock workers, we were in the business of handling freight and shipping that freight all over the United States. And some of us knew for a fact, we couldn't protect shipments anymore. It was out of our hands. It had gotten

away from us. Tracy was a 24-hour operation, and there was a work window where damage to outbound loads was too intense. And what was very strange, as big as that damage was, it's safe to say that only a handful of people understood it. The days kept passing. The raunchy style wasn't going away. It was here to stay. Time kept moving, and without acknowledging error, the terminal had to be considered just a gross exercise in business retardation. People were getting paid to push this rollout ogre. They collaborated. This was the way they wanted it because it lasted all the way until Yellow finally collapsed. Utility drivers were the future of Yellow Corporation.

It's sad. Nobody in management stood up for what was correct. The fact was, there was still an adequate amount of in-house dock workers who were operating at near peak levels, more than enough to keep the outbound running smoothly. However, Yellow chose to monkey around with the whole operation. Doors, bids, the seniority roster, and supplanting dock work with gross inexperience, all those things were contributing factors. Yellow Corporation needed those factors to keep going, to keep running a poor operation. Normal procedures were abandoned. Fundamentals were tossed aside. And travelers were called upon to make up the difference. It was a loss of capital on gross levels. If that's not bad business, then what is?

### The Utility Drivers, part three

It all comes back to square one, and how a responsible business trains its new employees and introduces them to the operation. There is a difference between formal training and informal training. I conducted formal training classes at Roadway for all new 809 employees. I did it, sometimes with an assistant, usually by myself. I also trained new employees on the dock for years, at CF, Roadway, and Yellow. When I was young, I did it frequently. It always required time and patience even if the company was bent on getting new workers up to speed. As a rule, new dock workers were carefully introduced to the inbound dock. And on the inbound, that new employee would be paired up with a senior worker for real hands-on training. He might even get instruction by two different dock workers over the course of his first week. That new

employee would be provided with all the tools necessary to work independently on the inbound. He would be given all the basics before he was checked off. Eventually, he would be trusted to do his own thing on the inbound, driving his own forklift and working his own trailer. If he made his probation, on the inbound he would remain until further notice. That was the rule at Yellow before the rollout. That was the rule at Roadway. And that was the rule at Consolidated Freightways. You do not start new employees on the outbound! You keep them on the inbound and you keep it simple. Always! New employees are confined to a given inbound space. It's for their own good, and it's for the good of the whole operation, inbound and outbound. New employees don't have any purpose being on the outbound side of the dock, period. You don't break that rule unless you're just looking for trouble.

I know the risks to placing new employees on the outbound end. Yellow, Roadway, and CF were all different, but they did have several common points of focus. New employees were expected to meet a certain working standard. Each carrier was different with levels of patience, where they thought an employee should be in their development by the time their probation period ended. Some dock workers were quick to get on an inbound learning curve, others were slow. There was no such thing as an outbound learning curve for new employees because the companies were smart enough to avoid that area. Even pre-rollout Yellow was smarter than that, and Yellow was a big-time laggard with respect to new employee training.

One thing that has always been avoided was placing junior personnel, especially new employees, within strips coming from satellite terminals. Having junior personnel working outbound strips can quickly become problematic. Too many things can go wrong. Problems can quickly become big problems. Those problems can suddenly become problems for other workers to solve. So, the rule is: *Do not start brand new employees on the outbound end, keep them on the inbound.* Keep them in strips coming in from far points, strips that are filled with shipments bound for either inbound satellites or city routes/traps. Keep it simple and to limit their range of choices. Initially pair them up with a tenured dock worker on the inbound end. Training begins within that atmosphere. New workers keep working strip trailers. They are taught

fundamentals within a controlled area of the dock, where they can be supervised, where they can be helped on a very direct basis. Eyes are on them. They will have to be left to work on an independent basis shortly. And they will have to get on an inbound learning curve. Once they meet a certain criterion, they will have to be trusted to work independently on the inbound. And that's where they stay until they eventually graduate in their working style. So, the rule was to always wait for dock workers to get on a freight learning curve. If they did show some good decision making, then they might be good candidates to work the outbound end of the dock. They would graduate to that station.

The starting line was the inbound. That was the correct position to start new employees, and to get them familiar with the operation. That's where the learning process is supposed to begin. New workers would get placed into strip trailers coming from far point terminals, strip trailers that would primarily go into 2 operations. 1). Inbound Satellites specific to the terminal. Or 2). The city operation, to routes or traps. Of course, the stripper must decide to either load the shipment or bay it up. 2 operations plus 2 options = 4 choices. Before the rollout, as working protocol, Yellow didn't cut new employees loose on the outbound. They didn't place them in satellite or city pick up strips that could in effect take them into 3 operations, the outbound, the inbound, or back into city routes/traps. 3 operations plus 2 options = 6 choices. Yellow didn't do it, Roadway didn't do it, nor did Consolidated Freightways. They were smarter than that. They didn't put new employees in that type of position, then give them a directive which tells them to load as much as they possibly can. New employees were confined to the smallest amount of space possible, keeping their decision making (all strip & stack options) as simple as possible. That was the correct directive. The more freight that was specific to large satellite load doors near their strip trailer, the better, especially in the early stages of their dock development. New employees were held tightly within the inbound. Even when the one-on-one training was over, experienced dock workers on the inbound would always be readily available in case new employees had questions. If driving a truck wasn't their focus, newer workers would become integral pieces within the inbound dock operation.

One obvious risk of placing a new dock worker on the outbound was the impact of potential misloads. If a new dock worker (or any dock worker) makes a mistake on the inbound, it might not amount to lost freight or a dissatisfied customer, even if it was a blatant misload into one of the wrong satellite terminals. When that did happen (and it happened frequently), satellites would often send that shipment right back. Those terminals were in a close position. The mistake was basically a little mistake, not a big mistake. However, if a shipment was misloaded on the outbound, especially within a blended operation where doors were scattered all about the dock in an uncoordinated fashion, that mistake was potentially a huge mistake. That shipment could be lost in transit for several days. It could wind up almost anywhere within the Yellow system of terminals that 813 was loading out.

Healthy terminals find ways to keep its high impact workers, workers who are proven commodities with strip, stack, and cube specifics, fixed and stationed on the outbound dock. And once that healthy terminal has that egg in place, it doesn't crack it. The company has realized that the whole system benefits from their presence. But Yellow Corporation redefined the learning cycle. In what other business can the learning cycle be thrown in the trash? Should such a business expect to post positive results? Is there a business out there that operates like that? Or did the engineers become the new pioneers in that realm? Maybe. But what did Yellow really do? They broke the rules when it came to new employee training. They trusted inexperience to get the job done. They also sidestepped much of the hands-on experience they already had. Maybe they were trying to rewrite the book on the learning cycle. In any event, it was false. Their engineering actions and their directives proved it. They already proved it with the gross integration of out-of-house workers, workers who collectively didn't bring anything of outbound working value. They hadn't even stepped onto the basic inbound learning curve yet, something that had always been a requirement. And Yellow Corporation wanted to get these truck drivers up and running, to have them get to point Z before even doing their dock A, B, C's.

In 813's last stages, not only was damage and poor cube all over the place, but so were misloads. Even city personnel were often finding misloads in trap trailers, which were

the easiest trailers to load. Satellite trailers were being stripped showing the names of the person who misloaded the shipment. And sometimes, several names would be listed on the computer. But often, the satellite would just load it back to us without an electronic signature, and we'd try to get it to the right terminal the second time around. But those were just little mistakes. Dock workers who were paying attention were catching misloads here and there, but sometimes a worker would just have to get lucky and see something in a trailer that didn't belong. Maybe a label would show something going to Oregon. If the trailer was going to Las Vegas, then a fix was in order. With effective oversight gone, the terminal was placing its shipping trust in a big group of woefully trained truck drivers. How could anybody who had any kind of freight sense expect them to achieve premium results?

We must never forget what types of trailers that utility drivers were working, and what types of shipments were in those trailers. Yellow Corporation did two things. First, they made the decision to rewrite the book on new employee training. And second, they brought inexperienced people into a big terminal and issued them a false directive. It was false because as a directive it ensured that outbound loads would be grossly added to on a poor working basis. Remember, these workers didn't possess the collective outbound chops yet. Nor had they proven anything yet. They were far from graduating to the outbound end of the dock. What they did do, however, was sweep over it with their freight. And because of the timing of it, and the fact that the tenured graveyard outbound crew had disappeared, outbound loads never stood a chance. Damage was being done, and because of the new design, there really wasn't anybody with outbound working experience to witness it. The big dogs had moved away. The work that they were accustomed to working was brought into the yard by utility drivers. They plugged that work into Tracy dock doors, and they worked that freight, freight that was saved for them. This was the new Yellow. And it worked like a fucking charm! And to think that the union sat back and allowed it to happen is disgusting.

The work wasn't protected. What else is there to know? Satellite trailers that were full of satellite shipments were reserved for people who didn't know what to do with it. And the people who knew what to do with those shipments were scattered. Does that

make sense? Yellow Corporation chose that design. They chose to do something else with customer freight, while simultaneously distorting the dock with erroneous door placements, and handing out a directive which ensured that inexperienced dock workers would act a certain way. Soon, back strips would become business as usual. The dock design and the work directive were both false.

Workers were out of position. Doors were out of position. Workers followed computer prompts. Misdirection was all over the terminal. And people were stepping hard on outbound loads, people who did not belong. Unfortunately, there were other people at Yellow Corporation who were big decision makers. Someone had to be responsible for the rollout design. It was crafted somewhere. And because Yellow was stuck with those types of decision makers, a big consolidation center out west never stood a chance.

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It's time to compare working crews. But before we compare one community of workers to another, let's take a sample of what the outbound graveyard crew in Tracy looked like in the past. Let's temporarily hold an opinion on how effective they were. Maybe previous outbound crews in Tracy were just okay. Maybe they were subpar. Maybe the company was completely dissatisfied with their overall performance. It really doesn't matter, because right now, I'm doing the grading. And right now, we're looking at what Yellow chose to do with its rollout satellite work versus what it chose to do with its satellite work in the past. And we must look at who was working that freight.

Let's acknowledge something one more time. We need to drive this point home even if it becomes an obnoxious fact. The fact is satellite work was saved for utility drivers to work on the Tracy dock. It can't be argued. It happened. The question is, what happened to the graveyard outbound crew of the past? The answer is simple. That crew disappeared. It was completely replaced. The normal graveyard outbound players disappeared into an abnormal rollout atmosphere that Yellow created by design. But who were they? If we're going to compare them to utility drivers, we need to know who

they were, especially if Yellow chose to give that work away.

Let's just assume graveyard hours are between 8:00 pm and 4:00 a.m. But if that 8-hour window slides up or down a bit, it doesn't matter. Midnight is somewhere near the heart of the bid, whatever the bid is. And 813 was bid differently, a few different start times emerged in the evenings over the last decade before Yellow closed. In any event, many of the same workers were bid for a 22:30 start, and/or a 19:30 start, and several of those workers came in 2 hours early to start working on the outbound end of the dock. They stripped city trailers, they stripped early arriving satellite trailers, they stripped old outbound strips that were leftover, or they would start by putting away freight that was still in bays. There were several things to do, there was a usual protocol, and a lot of the usual players did the same thing every evening no matter what the bid, no matter what the start time. An outbound foreman would already be in motion setting up the dock, awaiting their arrival. Usually, a weights and inspections person would be present, drifting in and out of the operation. It was the same faces year after year with occasional changes depending on annual bids, leave of absences, workers on disability, workers who died, or workers who desired to work in other operations. The outbound graveyard crew was easily recognizable even if it picked up a few new workers here and there. The same could be said about the inbound graveyard crew even though it was more robust with more junior pieces attached to it. It was also easily recognizable.

So, what did the outbound graveyard crew look like? After all, we need to compare them to the utility drivers since that's where the work went. We need to know who they were and what their basic duties looked like. We also need to offer up a collection of years. Let's cover a long stretch just to avoid confusion. Let's say 2014 to 2020. That's a seven-year window with a crew sample that can be defined even if some of the pieces were slightly altered, even if a few workers were drifting in and out of the graveyard outbound crew. Let's mention the big pieces and the little pieces. Let's note that they were in motion mostly within the outbound operation, dock doors running from the horseshoe and edging out somewhere around the 58 and 59 doors. These players had a common working constitution on the outbound end, and their overall impact to loads going out of Tracy was measurable. Let's just assume that their overall production was

adequate. Their ability to create outbound cube was adequate. We note that adequacy because in general, the managers weren't complaining about their performance, at least not within that seven-year window.

Three dock workers were constant. Each one patrolled and controlled an assortment of load doors, but they did strip freight within the outbound hybrid model. One monitored the Northwest doors and some doors beyond. He usually stripped trailers right next to those regional load doors. Another one monitored far points going east. He loaded and stripped within the horseshoe. He covered a large area full of stack doors. He tracked flagged shipments and created a few trailers that would go over the road. Another worker usually monitored southern load doors, and/or doors within the middle section of the operation, but he also stripped often during the early stages of the shift. Three more workers were strip heavy. All shift long, front to back, they blazed through city pick-ups and/or satellite strips. They might eventually toggle to the load side of the operation at some point, but if the floor was under control, they kept busy stripping freight. That was their focus. Each one of them made responsible strip & stack decisions. Another worker, when he elected to come back to graveyard, would be working stack trailers all night long. He lightly stripped, mostly he would fill up load doors going high and tight. He moved around the operation just like he moved around bids. But he did work graveyard for several years. A few other workers had 04:00 start times, but they would often come in for a 2 hour early start time and assist the graveyard crew by getting into satellite strips. They kept the operation adequately moving until dayshift arrived. If the outbound graveyard crew was down a worker or two, inbound workers might be requested to fill. Workers could easily reposition within the operation. The crew was pliable zone to zone, people could fill and cover for the normal performers when needed in case of absences or vacations. It could all be adjusted.

This was the outbound graveyard crew. Even if certain players were only participating for a few hours, they need to be mentioned because their impact was important to maintaining cube and connecting with the dayshift. All players had some juice. There was plenty of seniority in their make-up, especially for graveyard hours. Many of these workers could take other bids. All sorts of workers junior to them were

awarded bids that many workers considered premium. But this crew elected to work during graveyard hours, for one reason or another. There was a baked-in maturity to the graveyard outbound crew in Tracy. So long as it wasn't tampered with, the terminal didn't have to worry too much about maintaining outbound results, nor about maintaining load quality.

Now it's time to compare this crew to the utility drivers that basically supplanted them. Before I give my subjective grade, it's important to note that, yes, I was a part of this graveyard crew, but my personal feelings on the matter are very cold. We're just comparing bodies here and their overall impact to the operation. It's just a sterile exercise and there's no sour grapes on my part. As soon as the rollout happened, I was able to disconnect. I paid attention but ended up down on the inbound working that portion of the dock. Besides, in Yellow's last stages, the management team wasn't even asking me to go work satellite freight. So, I didn't. It was behind me. So even now, just as I was then, I'm aloof to it all. I can take a step back from it, and not only assess it, but I can judge it without prejudice. I can grade it because my real focus is elsewhere. It's not on me. My assessments always lean towards cube, because that is the business. But right now, we are required to make a grade of the parties involved because in the end, cube was sacrificed.

This grade, subjective or not, really is just a comparison of working style, especially with respect to outbound graveyard specifics, because that is where the damage was done. So, here is the comparison. *When compared to the pre-rollout outbound graveyard crew in Tracy, the utility drivers as a whole working collection weren't even in the same freight working ballpark.* We can take it even further. *When compared to the pre-rollout outbound graveyard crew in Tracy, the utility drivers as a whole working collection weren't even in the mother fucking parking lot of the same freight working ballpark.* How could they be? They had no outbound freight working experience!

Is the picture coming into focus yet? These two groups were oceans apart from one another. Yellow Corporation was setting a new standard. And what was sad, very few people understood the negative impact that utility drivers were having on the whole

operation in Tracy, and their destructive value to the system. The wheels were coming off the outbound. And Yellow Corporation opted for these guys to get involved on the dock in Tracy for several critical hours a night. The company saved work for them, satellite trailers full of premium outbound shipments that they handled and fed into the Yellow system. Yellow Corporation elected to break basic dock training rules. Yellow Corporation trusted utility drivers to build outbound loads instead of trusting proven commodities, high impact experienced Tracy dock workers who were already familiar with the Tracy dock; workers who were already familiar with outbound specifics. The choice to go with utility drivers was fundamentally incorrect. Within the first few weeks it was obvious. And Yellow Corporation rode these guys the rest of the way until the company finally collapsed. The fact was, despite any beliefs and despite any loyalties, utility drivers were dangerous to the terminal, an LTL consolidation center where shipments should be handled correctly. And there were people who designed this bullshit. And there were people who collaborated with this bullshit.

The seniority roster in Tracy had been compromised. Outbound loads were compromised. The damage was done. It had to play out that way. There wasn't any graveyard dock experience in place to effectively put adequate outbound loads together and to maintain adequate cube until day shift arrived. Inexperience was dropped inside the operation, and it had run amok. Yellow Corporation designed it. It's theirs now, they own it. The management team reinforced it. It's theirs now, it's on their résumé. And the union was caught with its pants down.

I'm a little curious. There must be examples all over the place where inexperience has produced strong results. Maybe there are all kinds of examples, like a purge of sorts, where inexperienced groups come in and replace experienced others, and suddenly wonderful things happen. Maybe it happens all the time in business, and in academics, and in the military, or in athletics. I've just never heard of it. Don't you have to learn something first? Doesn't it help to be a proven commodity with a track record? According to Yellow Corporation, apparently not.

Even on a kitchen table, with a simple 500-piece puzzle of a windmill, a landscape, or a sunken shipwreck, how long can someone force in puzzle pieces that are

inappropriate? How long can someone keep pushing in the wrong pieces? How long can a forceful style be effective? What's that puzzle going to look like? Will it even be worth fixing? And after the fact, what are those individual pieces even going to look like? And that's just a flat puzzle. Let's take that puzzle off the kitchen table and add a dimension. Let's make the puzzle a cube. And let's add puzzle, after puzzle, after puzzle, to work on with the same style. Let's create a massive problem. Let's keep cycling in more and more inexperienced puzzle builders just to see what the fuck happens. What an experiment in time!

Within a healthy LTL model, there is no room for a utility driver. Even if some of them are good workers, they have no function. A healthy model does not invite their presence. There's no need to bring in new faces to work the dock, people who are constantly picked up after. More and more inexperienced workers aren't required to work outbound freight. There is no concept of train-as-you-go. That detrimental style of work isn't required. No doors should be provided for them, not even on the edges. Hostlers should never be bothered by them. The position of utility driver should not exist. Within a healthy LTL model, the position of utility driver exists only as a weird concept, a tool of distortion. If a company is healthy, it's moved far beyond that type of thinking.

Utility driver usage might be a substantive argument within another universe of work. But healthy operations don't require a massive influx of dock inexperience to get the outbound job done. Nor do they encourage inexperienced others to drive into the yard with their own work, check in, then find an available door to work their own freight. Not only does that behavior take up valuable space, but it also slows down the operation. Despite all their efforts, they collectively step on the yard, they step on the needs of fixed dock crews, and they step harder on outbound running loads. That might be acceptable behavior within defunct LTL models, but not within a healthy model, a model where hostlers ensure that the dock is adequately fed with the right trailers and the right work, all doors plugged with the right trailers so that puzzle building can continue unhindered. For utility drivers to step on a terminal makes no sense, unless of course, your operation is already a mess. At that stage, does it really

matter? If you're an old LTL company, and you haven't figured out the basics yet, then you're probably dying anyways. A utility driver hemlock solution might be just what the doctor ordered.

A flag does exist. It's a big bright red flag that lets a company know that it's time to act quickly. Whoever came up with that idea, and whoever has agreed to it, and whoever has cosigned upon it, and whoever makes the decision to proceed with it, all those types of people need to be dismissed on an immediate basis. If there is any sense of urgency at all, it's to free the system of those actors who interject more and more inexperience into an operation, even if the operation is already defunct and grossly retarded. They've advertised that they have a radical new idea without fixing the immediate problem. They've heaped more of a problem onto an existing problem. This new seasoning will require experienced workers to deal with it, to work around more and more inexperienced others who are not only unfamiliar to the existing operation, but who far too often are of a poor working grade.

In any event, within a healthy working LTL universe, something like a utility driver is nothing but a marker. It advertises that someone needs to be identified, rooted out, and dismissed for simply suggesting the idea.

## The Utility Drivers, part four

We address this problem once more; we beat this ugly thing down until it dies. We expose it and we put it in the record. There can't be any room for bad engineering. We note it even if we must repeat ourselves, until it finally comes into sharp focus. And we continue to do so even if talking about this ugliness becomes upsetting. We do it because Yellow broke the rules. Yellow broke real training protocol, and it was very sneaky. This breach of training protocol was done when nobody was really looking. Utility drivers would trickle in while the graveyard crew was already in motion, a graveyard crew that was completely unbalanced, a dock that was freed up of outbound experience. The graveyard inbound crew, though very aware of the utility driver presence, were busy at work within their own operation. Real outbound participation

on graveyard had been obliterated by the rollout, those with outbound experience scattered about on different shifts or in different areas, replaced by only a few junior workers whose focus was narrow, and who weren't yet at the grade of pre-rollout outbound workers. Positions were rearranged, the optics had changed. Outbound supervision was effectively gone. Yellow supervisors were just inexperienced short tenured men who were told to close trailers, who were told there might be some reworks in order, who were forced to walk a dock that had outbound loads stretched out all over the place, not specific to one area. And the guys that used to police load doors were gone. The real hands-on supervision that the terminal had maintained for many years was absent.

And of course, the last witnesses to the utility driver debacle were the utility drivers themselves. And at that stage, with no viable witnesses and without any safeguards, the outbound loads fell victim. Much of the premium satellite freight was stripped out and put away with a new style during the wee hours of the night, when nobody was really looking. And as the night progressed, the utility drivers would finish up, park their forklifts, check out, and get back out on the road. Hours would pass and day shift crews would arrive. And depending on the number of bad loads, and the decisions that may or may not be made on those bad loads, and who was in attendance, and how far behind the yard was, and how many takeovers were against the dock, far too often, the outbound operation wouldn't stand a chance.

The days of consistently cleaning up the outbound were over. We had a new process that had completely compromised the outbound. We were now in the business of creating a rash of ugly loads, at least for several hours a night. And for those ugly loads that got pushed into the system, we had to assume that these loads weren't going to miraculously improve on their journeys to the next terminal. A guy that was next in line, the next guy who assigned one of these 813 strips wasn't going to have an easy go of it. That load was already in bad shape, with a little over the road or over the rail shaking and shifting, it's safe to say that the load didn't improve when it got to the next terminal. Some of these trailers were already losers before they even left the yard in Tracy. Further down the road, another worker in another terminal might be looking at next

level stuff, hard workings that were in that last category of freight, the category of shipment avalanches. We could only assume this because we never really saw what they looked like at the next handling destination. In Tracy, all we could see were too many bad loads had somehow formed. Often those loads were unsecured, and they were closing. But once again, it was out of our hair. The system had absorbed it. Another outbound trailer was gone. The problem had been solved. The new process was in full force, a process that we had to trust, a process that was in full stride, a process that in freight reality would eventually have to correct itself. Maybe a Yellow miracle was in the works.

There was an absolute failure to protect the seniority roster in Tracy. That seniority roster contained real working experience, experience that could (if ordered correctly) translate positively to running outbound loads that continued to fill, outbound loads that pushed freight deep into the Yellow system of terminals.

A selection of senior workers within a seniority roster, can provide quality to an outbound operation, but only if the terminal is bid correctly, and the dock is designed correctly. However, the Tracy terminal not only took that aspect of experience within its own seniority for granted, but it maliciously side stepped it, and the management team chose to build loads with a horde of poor performing out-of-house temporary dock workers who had nothing going for them other than a CDL. The satellite freight that was specific to Tracy should have been plugged to the dock and/or saved in the yard for its own outbound graveyard workers. Instead, too much of it was given to inexperienced outsiders to work on the Tracy dock. This new working motion, this new rollout approach negatively translated into poorly running cube creations, a vast collection of catastrophic looking loads, a collection of shipments that were the lifeblood of the carrier. This whole apparatus was out of bounds. It was beyond sloppy. And it was beyond suggestive. The engineers at Yellow Corporation, whoever they were, were getting away with it. In the end, they couldn't be stopped.

Yellow Corporation had fashioned a big broom of inexperience which ran over the whole dock night after night, negatively impacting outbound loads before the system

even had a chance to make heads or tails of it. Yellow was conducting bad business in the early stages of its system workings. Terminals deeper in the Yellow system hadn't even touched the freight from 813 yet. They hadn't even had a chance to do their own handling thing. The big broom of utility drivers completely unraveled the effectiveness of the terminal in Tracy, and very few people were there to witness it because of the timing of it all. But there were attendees. Left in attendance was a group of button lipped managers. Left in attendance were the utility drivers themselves. Left in attendance was the inbound graveyard crew, many of whom were concentrating on freight loading to inbound satellites, to city traps and city routes. In general, they weren't bringing their freight to outbound load doors. Those were the participants present as the big broom went back and forth, filling up more and more trailer space.

Real process is based upon keeping responsible outbound in-house dock crews busy, keeping as many high impact graveyard workers in motion in trailers that are specific to the needs of the operation. The goal is to keep them focused on working high impact satellite trailers and city pick up trailers, and to fill other outbound load trailers up with that freight (our lifeblood), and to respect cube the whole time, because once those trailers effectively fill, they will go deep into the Yellow system of terminals. Tenured graveyard crews continue to do this on an effective basis until day shift arrives. With a correct bid structure, the transition between shifts is smooth, the running load trailers are at least respectable, the number of trailers to work and get through is realistic. Day shift is left in a position to succeed, not to fail. But that responsible approach to work disappeared.

Let's beat this ugly thing down some more. The outbound hybrid model was gone, a model that was effective because of the type of experience that made it run. That model had been blown up. With the rollout, operations were blended, door change was incessant, bids were altered, and the cross-dock directive was pressed down. And with the failure to save satellite work and create bids which were graveyard driven, dock working oversight in key areas was a thing of the past. In effect, hands-on supervision by seasoned dock working professionals was gone. Outbound shipments were in the hands of other out-of-house truck drivers who were collectively (at best) low caliber

dock workers. They were mostly dock bottom feeders who had no real standardized training by dock professionals, nor any tenure to speak of which if done correctly would have placed them on the inbound, probably for years, working trailers coming into 813 from deep in the Yellow system until they could graduate to working satellite trailers that had vast collections of premium (system affecting) outbound freight. So, why would anyone require utility drivers to step on the dock in Tracy? To conduct an experiment? To see how bad loads are formed? What kind of business does that?

Yellow Corporation broke the learning cycle. The company smashed it and elected instead to drop this big swath of inexperienced workers right into the heart of a big operation, right into the heart of graveyard. These workers were set in motion, and they had come to Tracy completely ill-equipped. They weren't even close to being on par with traditional dock working professionals, especially 813 outbound dock workers. Yellow Corporation opted for them, however. These new workers essentially took work away from seasoned dock working personnel. Yellow chose to give this work to utility drivers, a large collection of poor grade dock workers who didn't even have a fucking seniority number in Tracy. And it couldn't be denied. Nor could the number of old trailers that were filling up the yard be denied. All of it was cause and effect. When the whole mess of things got too deep, the travelers were summoned.

Yellow Corporation was deep in failure, and they continued to promote this rollout. The company was obviously committed to it because management was not owning the problem. Management was telling the employees in Tracy that utility drivers were the future. But in freight reality, if left unfixed, this future was nothing more than an endless cycle of inexperience that would continue to step on the dock and continue to step hard on outbound loads. More and more out of house truck drivers were constantly being rotated in. And, another person who stepped on the Tracy dock, a person with a CDL, would be lost. But these inexperienced truck drivers would continue to work premium satellite freight, and in inexperienced working motion, they would collectively continue to destroy outbound loads. They had to destroy the loads because they didn't have the chops. They hadn't gotten onto an outbound learning curve yet. And new ones were showing up, getting cycled in, repeatedly. The process continued, a process

irrespective of responsible outbound puzzle building. The utility driver process guaranteed outbound load failure. It had to play out that way. The cross-dock strip to stack directive forced it to happen.

During Yellow's last stages, a raw question was in order. Were we doomed? We asked it over and over again even if the question itself was too vague. The system was big. All we had were our own eyes and our own flat plane to look upon. A few of us were certain however, if the design remained unchanged, the outbound loads would be doomed. The premium satellite freight would be doomed. Could the system continue to absorb those negative impacts? Could the company afford it?

If not corrected, Yellow would have to be doomed especially if this was happening in other terminals. On this rollout path, how could we last very long? The company had shattered the learning cycle. It had dropped a massive amount of inexperience right inside one of its largest terminals, and this inexperience was cut loose for several hours. The by-products of those critical hours prompted questions. And the doom question was becoming more and more valid as the weeks got behind us. By the time the company started to take in water and the rumor mill in Tracy picked up an ugly momentum, the doom question became entirely valid. It was also valid because Yellow Corporation was getting away with this new process. And there were no safeguards in place.

Maybe the Tracy terminal simply took its seniority roster for granted. Maybe it took its graveyard crew for granted. They rolled a new process and reinforced it all the way. They fashioned dovetails, rebids, incessant door changes, and brought in a boatload of out-of-house dock working inexperience. The company elected to go a different direction. They preferred to place their bets on a big broom of inexperience, and then cut it loose. It was set in ugly motion and by doing so, a cross-dock beast was further amplified. It was in full force. But who or what paid the price for that action?

Outbound load trailers, wherever they were positioned, paid the price. The whole terminal paid the price for it. The yard paid the price for it because backlog was looming

bold. The freight paid the price. The customers paid the price. The Yellow system paid the price. The design of creating a big broom of out-of-house inexperience and brushing it back and forth over the dock hour after hour, of having a colossal amount of poor decision-making take place within a big Yellow terminal, was bound to have predictable results. The engineers had effectively created a forceful directive, the product of which was the wholesale compromise of responsible cube. This directive was reinforced by the management team. Like it or not, they were all on board, complicit in every way.

Let's keep beating this thing down until we're tired of it. I'm already tired of it, but we must keep going. Tracy was at the mercy of out-of-house inexperienced truck drivers who forced freight into trailers on an ineffective basis during the wee hours of the night. They took a big portion of satellite freight away from seasoned Tracy dock workers. And like some weird LTL formula, Yellow Corporation expected trailers to effectively fill up on a cube respecting basis from a big swath of out-of-house truck drivers, truck drivers that hadn't stepped onto the LTL learning cycle yet. But the company brought them in anyway, placed them on forklifts, and had them work high impact freight. And after several hours of late-night damage, they were all gone, like they hadn't even been here. But they had been here. Their handiwork was all over the place.

Satellite freight is high impact freight. Why? Because it impacts the inbound, the city, and the outbound. All three operations are impacted, and because much of that freight will be loaded into outbound doors, that freight impacts the system early on. If it is done incorrectly, the terminal and the system do not stand a chance. And on the plane of Tracy dock, it was done incorrectly. That freight was handled and put away in trailers by low impact players, truck drivers who had absolutely no outbound feel for the place, nor the shipments that they were handling.

Freight from Santa Rosa (805), San Francisco (811), Sacramento (809), Oakland (889), and other satellites specific to Tracy, had been handled by the same seasoned personnel for many years. There were exceptions of course, but that satellite freight tended to strip out clean. Those satellites did good work making sure that Tracy wouldn't burn long hours stripping out bad loads. Seasoned outbound dock workers

blazed through those loads. The freight arrived in Tracy showroom clean, and the outbound crew did its best to put it into the system so it would stay showroom clean. All that satellite freight was effectively loaded out, one way or another. And the whole time, the crew's ability to maintain cube was respected. And quite often they would do it like it was a walk in the park. On a good night, the outbound graveyard crew could walk away with the assurance that they hadn't crapped on the next shift. Day shift workers knew they were in a good position to keep the ball rolling, to put it all away, and to wrap the outbound. That was the expectation. That was the goal. Put it away clean, put it away effectively, go high and tight, and leave the next shift in good hands. Job well done.

Opting for out-of-house inexperienced truck drivers was a productivity flip-flop. On one side of that flip-flop was a vast number of inexperienced dock workers who were suddenly working premium satellite freight. They were directed to load as much of it as they could, to place those shipments into load doors which (if they were outbound doors) would get pushed deep into the Yellow system. Yellow was banking on their productive value. On the other side of the flip-flop were the normal outbound dock workers in Tracy, dock workers that normally added value to the outbound, workers who were familiar with stripping and stacking premium satellite freight. They had done it effectively for years. Now, those workers were melded into the cross-dock beast, into a new operation. They disappeared into other avenues of work, into other shifts, into other low-impact areas. Some of those participants weren't interested in adding the quality that they once provided. The work environment had changed. Yellow had forced their hand. The operations were blended. Door misplacements destroyed traditional looking outbound work areas. And with the dovetail, all sorts of new bids were available. And worst of all, utility drivers had taken away outbound satellite work. All those factors added up. Soon, too many outbound work horses were gone. The outbound had been blown apart. And now dayshift was placed in the horrible position to make losing decisions. Too many loads were set up poorly which adversely affected their abilities to make quick one-and-done stacking decisions. Too often, normal looking cleanup decisions were gone.

Cutting away experience worked like a charm. Yellow cut this section out and replaced it with a swath of others. It was set firmly in place, and it was established as standard operating procedure in Tracy. In effect, experienced workers (proven outbound commodities) became low impact players, and inexperienced workers (workers who didn't even belong on the dock) became high impact players. It was a tool, a mechanism that produced a long series of poorly loaded trailers, trailers that would either go deep into the Yellow system of terminals, or it would produce trailers that because of their lack of overall quality and cube utilization were rework candidates. This flip-flop mechanism also produced a lack of real meaningful participation from many of the terminal's high impact employees (day shift and graveyard), employees that historically had put value into the operation.

Before the rollout, 813's outbound crews were cube guarantees. The graveyard crew guaranteed that value (by their continued interactions with satellite and city pick up trailers) would be maintained on an outbound load basis which they had done for years. Freight was worked on a high impact, high value basis, by experienced freight working professionals, whether their individual emphasis leaned towards the stack side, or the strip side. All that freight had been put away effectively on a professional basis. And the outbound day shift crew guaranteed that the ball would keep rolling. The terminal was in good hands, at least on the outbound end. But that outbound specific professionalism disappeared into a big-dovetail-rebid-soup. Some workers went to an assortment of other bids, bids that were changing, bids that were moving into other new start times, bids that were being abolished, bids that allowed workers to drift into other operations, bids that allowed workers to just say something like . . . *I'm done! I'm doing my little thing, and I'm not worrying about all the bullshit that is happening in this place, especially on graveyard. I'm done with nights. I got the juice to go anywhere I want anyways.*

The outbound graveyard crew had effectively been obliterated by crafted design. The satellite work that outbound professionals were accustomed to working was gone, taken up by others, worked on the Tracy dock by people who weren't even on the Tracy seniority roster, people who collectively were just a bunch of lost balls in tall grass. The

fact that they possessed CDL's was meaningless. Those CDL's didn't add value to the dock operation. But somehow, those CDL's opened a door. How does that happen? How is it allowed to happen? Well, it happened. And with that new utility driver process, the normal outbound dogs in Tracy just blended in. The graveyard dogs moved around, and many of them didn't care too much anymore. They were done with it. And the day shift dogs were placed in horrible lose-lose positions. Many of them stopped caring as well. The outbound dogs, whatever the shift, were getting handed little cross-dock strips, and they participated in their own little way. Occasionally, they were involved with little fix it projects, but too often they just didn't care about what anybody had to say about doing the right thing.

All locals should have been doing everything possible to preserve the integrity of existing seniority rosters like the one in Tracy. There were failures everywhere. And many people that hovered around the terminal didn't do their job. Therefore, there were no protections. And many people just didn't see it. They didn't see that the integrity of the seniority roster in Tracy had been completely compromised. The value of experience within that roster was thrown right into the trash. Many people didn't have a problem with it. But with no understanding of who is who, and what people of experience can offer (especially on the dock where the real LTL game is), the terminal was rendered helpless, especially with no safeguards that prevent work from getting parceled out, from getting outsourced within your own facility. The whole thing is truly sad and must be considered bad business no matter how it's interpreted. The Teamsters should have seen this one, unless of course, the Teamsters had absolutely no understanding of the risks involved, and how those risks could adversely affect the intricate workings of an LTL consolidation center. Somebody approved utility driver usage. Somebody had to cosign on it. The doors were swung wide open, and outside work was invited in. Unfortunately, those outsiders brought plenty of dock working inexperience along with them. And despite all their good intentions, the collection of utility drivers victimized outbound loads in Tracy. They didn't collectively possess the outbound dock working chops. They were set in motion and that big broom of dock working inexperience did a number on the place. And it's safe to assume it did a number on the Yellow system of terminals that were recipients of those poor cube

constructions. After all considerations, jobs were at stake. The Local and the International deserve some hard criticism on this one because in effect the lifeblood of the carrier was getting mishandled five nights a week.

A seniority roster, and what that seniority roster can provide for a large terminal, can be a safety mechanism. If a terminal understands the value of its workforce, then it doesn't go out of its way to replace work with subpar performers, nor with workers who are out of position, nor with workers who are grossly lacking dock work experience. If a person has no stacking experience, why would any terminal go out of its way to place those types of workers in high impact outbound areas that require door integrity to be maintained on a responsible basis?

Post rollout, there was still normal inbound graveyard activity happening in Tracy. But the inbound crew was in high gear doing their own normal inbound thing, confined to a given area. They couldn't effectively bear witness to items that were beyond their own lines of sight. They weren't in a position to fix or correct anything on an outbound basis. As a collection they weren't driving in and out of outbound load doors. They were all stripping trailers from far point Yellow terminals. That freight was going into the city operation, traps, or into satellite loads. The edge of their operation was the 64 door on the even side, and the 65 door on the odd side. Beyond that all the way to the horseshoe was a black hole of outbound strip doors and outbound load doors. Despite a couple of Yellow dock workers who had just a few years of seniority, (workers doing strips, doing reworks, cleaning bays, or doing projects), the area was left wide open, basically unsupervised, far away from senior eyes. Another community of workers trickled into the terminal one at a time. Eventually they would find forklifts and get into working motion. They were also doing their own thing as they brushed over the whole operation, making one poor decision after another. The high impact satellite work was now in new hands. High impact outbound dock workers were out of the outbound graveyard picture. The big broom of utility drivers moved over the whole operation. And the terminal in Tracy was completely discombobulated.

Time has passed. A person might argue that the utility driver spectacle didn't happen.

Someone might argue that in wholeness, it was a positive activity. However, let's put up a caution flag and understand that given the task at hand, building 3 dimensional puzzles on an outbound load basis, given the amount of dock inexperience suddenly placed on the Tracy dock, given how the cross-dock directive can force a particular motion, or behavior, and given the amount of outbound dock experience that was no longer present, results were predictable. In Tracy, poor results had to happen, the design forced them to happen. It was an engineering falsehood.

To reiterate, what was the business here? The business was the gathering of pieces, effectively creating three dimensional puzzles from those pieces, then at some far point(s), taking those pieces apart and disseminating those pieces back into the business community. That's the LTL game. And if there is an outbound load standard to that game, then a graveyard outbound area devoid of normal LTL working dock experience, and in working attendance is supplanted by gross dock inexperience, will amount to a collection of wayward constructions. That is an entirely different working style. It's backwards. It might look productive on a computer, but in real LTL freight working time and space, it isn't. It's a working style that will continue to produce poorly so long as available experience is kept away from the operation for several critical hours when satellite freight is at peak strip levels. And so long as more and more inexperienced participants are cycled in and out, and never have a fair opportunity to learn, this working style will continue to victimize cube. Those types of new creations will continue to run poorly until acted upon. If not fixed, those creations will negatively affect the operation and the system because those poor creations must be worked. How long can LTL truck drivers continue to haul a rash of poor cube creations around the Yellow system? How many times can workers be asked to rework the poor working efforts of other workers? How many hours is a company willing to invest in that type of wasteful activity?

The rollout phase was not the time to be experimenting with something awkward, nor was it the time to try to get innovative by being completely unconventional. Change can't be justified if the results are immediately poor, and those results remain poor. If that's not the time to clean house, then what is? With respect to acting responsibly on

an LTL basis, there are several questions that can't be avoided because as a consolidation center, 813 became a poor performer. It wasn't even a shadow of its pre-rollout-self. And some questions were never answered. Simple questions like, did the Tracy terminal do anything well before the rollout? If it did, then did Yellow build on those things? Or did Yellow break those things down? Within the Yellow system, was 813 reputable for anything at all, or was it always just a bottom feeder terminal? 813 either built on its strengths, or it didn't. And if it didn't choose to build on its strengths, then why would it do that? As a business, is choosing not to build on your strengths an abnormal business behavior? As a business, is choosing not to build on your strengths a form of business bloodletting?

We move forward with a clear understanding that, like a paper kite, an LTL consolidation center is a very fragile thing. It can be easily torn apart if it's placed within inexperienced hands. The utility drivers were Yellow Corporation's gift to the Tracy terminal. And though we can only speculate about their overall impact, as a tool, it probably did the most damage. It was quiet. It was keen. It was collectively obscene.

## 10 | Lights Out

Where was the union? None of us knew a damn thing other than we were still in business. But unlike all the times in the past when wrangling was required to move forwards, when crying wolf worked, when frightened people in droves were willing to give up their hard earned wages and benefits after being sold a bunch of corporate jive, a very effective scare-tactic-tool in order to get what one side wants, this time around the whole drama felt different. The feeling was like being kicked to the curb.

The debt, the loans, the losses, the mergers, the blunders, had taken a toll. Now with both sides walking away from the table at such a critical junction, it took on the appearance of a death march. People on the dock and in the yard were searching for answers, asking questions anywhere they could. Were the business hatches really caving in? It was only natural that the social fabric at a large consolidation center out west would somehow reflect the succession of poor events, of a carrier with poor direction, a carrier where real communication had left the building. Yellow Tracy had completely morphed into a work environment filled with wild rumors and fear.

I knew a few workers who were busy scouring the internet for information, any news anywhere, anything tangible. What was happening at other terminals, other union halls? Dock workers, truck drivers, hostlers, office clerks, mechanics, line haul people, and dock foreman were asking questions. *Let me know if you hear anything* became the 813 mantra.

The word on the dock was that once the Teamsters finish up all the contract business at UPS they'd focus on Yellow. They'd get back to the table. It might be an emergency band-aid, but something would get put together. There was still hope. Maybe it was just another rumor. With communication breaking down, new rumors were not only floating about, but they were gathering momentum.

Health care rumors caught fire. Big changes were on the horizon. If Yellow survives, we might have to start paying more for healthcare, one way or another, through changes to co-pays, types of coverage, types of providers, or through up-front costs. Health care uncertainty was all over the dock. We were getting a scattering of information. People were calling all over the place. But right now, we had coverage. So, it was time to make appointments, fill prescriptions, and get into see your physician without getting taken to the cleaners. Healthcare really was the last card we were holding. It's what kept many of the people here over the years especially once the pension talks fell through.

The next rumor to catch fire was that a vote was coming. Somehow this one emerged. It was attached to some temporary contract, or some junky looking (MOU) just to keep Yellow afloat. Some of the senior workers talked to other workers about it, reminding them that first nobody has heard anything, and second, for a vote to be called several things must first happen. Stewards and business agents would be put into motion, and the subject matter would be specific. So many workers who asked about it were reminded that a vote wasn't pending, and if an actual vote was called for, several events would proceed. So just relax.

This rumor was troubling. I remember thinking about all the times that I had to vote on a few different items such as to strike or to make pay concessions. Many of the workers here didn't come with my experience, which I always considered a good thing because I wouldn't wish my road on anyone. So, when I heard it, I would tell those who asked about it not to think about having to vote on anything. Put it out of your mind. When and if that happens, all of us will be informed. Other senior workers were dispelling that rumor as well. It was a bad fire that needed extinguishing.

Some workers are well adjusted to keep out of the rumor mill, others aren't. Some of the junior workers persisted with it. And sometimes it would morph into the big question that was on everyone's mind. Are we going out of business? And that big question was all over the terminal, in every nook and cranny of the place. So, each time

it arrived all I could do was keep my answer simple and toned down, something like, *We're still in business, we're still picking up freight. Keep showing up, do your job well, and take care of the freight. That's all we can do right now.*

Maybe not the best advice, a little cold, but workers kept arriving with questions all shift long. It was the best I could do. Other senior men were advising others in their own ways within an atmosphere of uncertainty, a place where people were giving serious thought about having to go elsewhere. All of it was high stress stuff. Miscommunication was everywhere. The place was already strange enough before the rumor mill picked up steam.

We had another community of workers in Tracy, the Reddaway people. They were already very cliquish, now they tightened up their ranks even more. For a while they took up a big section of dock space which remained cordoned off so they could do their own thing. The Yellow crowd and the Reddaway crowd worked on a segregated basis until the rosters finally dovetailed. The whole dock was opened back up, an event that brought the dock back into one large consolidation center where all parties could travel and work alongside one another.

I couldn't get a read on the Reddaway people. I didn't have time to get to know them, that takes years. They were still new to us, and many of them didn't come with much seniority. After the dovetail, most of them settled into the middle and lower sections of the seniority roster. I didn't waste too much time assessing them. I knew this however. The Reddaway crowd, despite their efforts, had no collective sense of outbound. Kansas City was no different than Fresno. Sacramento was no different than Denver. Oklahoma City was no different than Visalia. They were all just doors to find, to load their shipment into, then get back to their strip trailer. In general, they had little sense of the specifics of outbound versus inbound. They came from a regional carrier, and they were taught differently. And even up to the very end, they acted like regional carrier workers. High cross-dock numbers were encouraged. Their activities might have appeared as collectively copacetic, but through their behaviors and the way they approached all load doors (outbound & inbound), many of them never really adapted to the requirements of far point loading. Like several others within the Yellow crowd, they

loaded and ran. And on an outbound basis, their collected approach (their style) often amounted to a poor running cube, a rework, or a trailer that was just relegated to let-go status, meaning, yes it stinks, it's probably a loser, but let's send it anyways. It's not a knock on the Reddaway crowd, they were merely acting within their regional nature.

To many of us in Tracy, the Reddaway people were just innocent bystanders, people caught in the wake of a catastrophic business plan, just another community of people from another company that Yellow Corporation gobbled up many years before, another company that was deep in the process of getting destroyed.

And then the ax fell. We weren't picking up any more freight. The gig was up. Managers were summoned to back offices, thanked for their service, and released. People sat on their forklifts witnessing the drama, of more and more managers walking out of the place, of less trailers to work, of more empty areas as the freight dried up. The visual changed, the terminal took on a naked look. The workers who remained could now look across the yard at open spaces and rows of empty trailers. To the south, looming on the other side of Pescadero Road was an immense warehouse. It didn't look inviting, but it might be worth thinking about until something better arrives. Without work in front of them to keep them busy, people sat on forklifts. Some chatted. Some played on their phones. A few others could be seen parked alone. They might have been thinking about the future. Thoughts like . . .

*. . . that warehouse is huge. What do those wages look like? What kind of work will be required? Am I physically able to do that kind of work? Will I have to be on my feet all night long? Will it require me to get on my knees? What kind of hours am I looking at? What type of health care plan is available? How much of it will I have to cover? Maybe they aren't even hiring. Maybe I should get of my ass and try to get over there as soon as possible. If it's a big drop in pay, or if it's too rough on my body, it might be just something temporary that I can do until I find something better . . . . .*

These were just some of the things workers could think about while they talked, or

while they meditated on their parked forklifts. We knew that word on this place would soon become official.

During Yellow's last days, a few trailers trickled in. But there wasn't much to do. Workers on bid didn't care who was working or who was sitting. Some wanted to keep busy, so they knocked out strips if available. Others chose to double up and talk as they worked. People huddled around different areas of the terminal in different cliques, many of them stayed out of sight and out of mind. People were also coming and going. There was still a little overlap of shifts. Some guys were here early, some stayed around to touch bases.

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One last morning a handful of men gathered in the breakroom. They settled in for some final thoughts and to respectively clear the air. It was time to get it out, push out whatever you're holding. Purge your heart and move on. The Yellow runway was behind us. None of us could have predicted that it would end like this. But for better or worse, Yellow was worth the run.

It was a perfect storm of a meeting. Here was a selection of Tracy's best. For any business, these were the guys that companies should seek out to move their products. Of the 10 best puzzle builders at 813, at least half of them were here. A few men were missing, they may have already packed up their bags and seen enough.

With schedules being what they are, with the size of the place being what it is, the event was strange. To have this many high impact workers in one setting was a rare event. Meetings like this just don't happen. Even more special was the fact that nobody was here that would take the floor and talk incessantly. The guys that don't know when it's time to listen, especially to more knowledgeable people, those guys weren't here. The guys who interrupt meaningful conversations, the little mouths that take up too much floor time, especially during moments when the adults should be talking, those guys weren't here. The disrespectful crowd had been avoided. All the

kids were out of the room. Furthermore, all inexperience was out of the room. All the people who have never worked freight on the dock were not here. There was nothing here but fine-tuned tenure. We were set for some final words to close the book on this place. We were just saying goodbye in our own working way.

The Tracy terminal was big. Several months before the end, it had a seniority roster that exceeded 200 names. In the last week the roster contained 187 names, a wide mix of dock workers, hostlers, and drivers. There were a few guys who could do any work, everything the terminal had to offer on a bid basis. But only a handful of workers could build an adequate load from scratch, to wipe out heavy areas with a professional style, to work an entire shift making correct decisions, and to avoid compounding running stack problems. Their year after year participation on the stack side of the operation made them proven commodities. Five workers of that stack constitution were here, pure dock guys who could build exquisite loads, cover big areas if necessary, and do it at a strong clip. But today we also had a couple of truck drivers here, and one of them could effectively do both, build puzzles and drive. In my estimation he was much more valuable to the company while he was on the dock. In other words, he brought more value to the company on the stack side of the operation provided he was left alone. Even if he could hook or bump on an above average basis, he had more working value up on the dock. Building puzzles is another dimension of work. Achieving cube is where the game is at, and this driver could do it. Was he on par with the big dogs? Maybe, maybe not. It didn't matter, because if motivated, he could load them up. Were they a little heavy? Yes. Did he push the envelope? Yes. Did he flirt with overload territories and screaming axle weights? Yes. But he wasn't alone in that regard. Graveyard had another heavy dog as well. Pushing heavy was their style. There are many ways to load a trailer. So long as it gets down the road safely, securely, and on a timely basis, that's all that really matters.

All participants attending were deserving of being here. A few of the men had the gift of gab, they could talk endlessly about the same subjects. And of course, the topic of our pensions was mentioned, even if just briefly. We were required to discuss it at some ugly point. There was no avoiding it. We had been left high and dry. The Teamsters

had let us down.

Many years ago, the company and the union walked away from one another at the pension table. The pension out west had suddenly pivoted. There were no more contributions. Nor were hours accredited which healthy pensions need to meet the requirements of retirement formulas. We were watching our union pensions lose value year after year. Meanwhile, the world kept moving. The cost of living and inflation weren't slowing down waiting for us to play catch-up, especially in California. The union retirement party felt more like a pipe dream. It felt like a big fat interest free loan that we were on the wrong side of. It felt like some guise of a pension, where real value was just slipping away, where adjusted dollars would become less impactful. The best option for workers had been to leave and find a greener landing spot where the Teamster Pension was still active, where they could work and keep their hours moving so they could get accredited for the year. So, years earlier when the failure happened, workers did leave. And many of them did retire. But the people here at Yellow were mired, our retirement camp was bedraggled. Those who were charged to go to bat for us just walked away. As one of my retired coworkers at Consolidated Freightways described it for me recently,

*“You guys got royally fucked!”*

Indeed, all the men in this room did get royally fucked. We got left behind. But we handled it. Some of us harped on it far too often and it was a tired conversation. It was a very effective way to get depressed in a hurry. But that sore subject had to get sparked up today. And talking about it was our right. Besides, whose money was it? Whose money was getting held up? And make no mistake, we were getting held up. The machinery involved isn't that difficult to decipher. It's much harder to dwell on it and let it gnaw on you, that's really the hard part. Understanding its working parts is the easy part. Those things come into view especially if you have long years to study them. There was a failure, plain and simple, because the purpose of a pension or a retirement plan is to retire. That's why it exists. If it doesn't work for the worker, the person doing long years, the person doing the hours, the person doing the labor, the person following the rules, the person that has placed their trust in an institution or organization charged

with keeping that plan moving ahead, high risk or not, then the pension or retirement plan is nothing but a turd. Western workers were left behind. A robust Teamster retirement party became exclusive and we weren't invited. Maybe those of us who are still alive can sweep up an empty ballroom after everyone else has had their fun. Some of us might be able to show up years down the road even if it is a much leaner future.

Never underestimate the power of watching coworkers die around you, guys who should've retired but just didn't have the steam to keep going. Their bodies didn't hold up. They still had the dream, but the pension-device had changed midstream. And they weren't equipped for the change. They tried but physically they failed. They quite literally lost everything. They didn't make it. And coworkers watched them die. We all tried to make sense of it. We knew one thing for sure. Those who had bargained for us had failed. The Teamsters made this bed and some of the adults here weren't giving the union an inch. Trust had gone out the window years ago.

Now opposed to all that failed machinery was a room of healthy men who were still in working motion, survivors who weren't finished off yet. And some of them had some choice words about both company and union. Both company and union were complicit in the ugly affair, this closing dance where there were plenty of fingers being pointed. Mentioned was the thinking that the whole affair was choreographed somehow, suggestive of a total lack of trust of all parties, even if someone had come down from the local to talk to members this week. That didn't amount to shit. There was no value in it. The gig was already up. There were some hardcore union men here, and they weren't playing along with all the tow-the-line union bullshit. If we chose to make sense of it with a complete lack of trust of company and union, and to lump them together, then that was the prerogative of any man here. It was time to get it out and be brutally honest. We had ample uninterrupted space and there was nothing else to do. The work was gone. And as the usual talkers talked, I could tell a few of the men here were just listening in, patiently waiting their turn. They'd step inside the circle, take the floor, and push in their chips when the time was right.

The room was a loose huddle and the dialogue remained simple enough. Most of the talk was predictable. Of course, some of the big blunders were mentioned. The

mergers, the branding, the loans, the debts, and such forth. One of the men wanted to go there some more and to rehash items. But it was all tired ground. We already knew the company résumé, so the mood was to sidestep a reiteration of all those facts. Those things were already ingrained into our working fibers, just pieces within our fucked-up-Yellow-DNA. So, people here were dodging it. We weren't interested in a history lesson or some Yellow opinion piece. And another bitch session about the direction of the company was just a waste of time. Instead, it was more important to really make your words count. Everyone would get their chance, even the more reserved cats who were on the edges of the main conversation. It was safe here, and everything was fair game. It was time to speak your peace without being judged. This would likely be the last time you'd ever see some of the faces inside this room.

Names were tossed about. People were hopping off. Guys had found work elsewhere. They had moved quickly in the last few weeks. No surprise. People had been talking for months, something of a deadline loomed, things needed to happen for the company to move forwards. Those things didn't happen. Some guys with CDL's didn't hesitate, they'd seen enough, and they weren't waiting around. Yellow was already in their rear-view mirror. People were getting interviews, drug tests, background checks, and start dates. Who could blame them? The ship had been unstable for months, and the fear had become tangible.

We were heading into the weekend, and all we kept hearing was the company was going to file for some sort of bankruptcy. Mixed messages were everywhere. But we knew once the order went out for drivers not to pick up any more freight that it was over. The system would not be fed any more sustenance. What more did anyone need to know? The system would be purged soon enough, freight would trickle in, then dry up. Probably by Sunday or Monday it would officially be over.

Next, the discussion broke into new areas. It didn't sound like anyone here was considering taking a COBRA. One of the guys had researched those costs. That amount didn't even seem real. It was part of another universe. The subject was quickly saddled, and the discussion returned to what items were left to us. How would this whole Yellow

thing get sliced up? What, if anything, would we ever see? And other than the job, what did we really have at Yellow? We had a health care plan which was ending shortly. We had a wrecked pension. And we had an unmatching 401(k). And for some people at this stage, a bare bone 401(k) was not even worth considering even if it had been nicely slid in and elegantly titled. Other than healthcare, basically we had lost everything. We really weren't making shit, and we all knew it.

Years ago, we had already made a big concession to our wages. We voted nationwide in an environment of stirred up fear whether to give a percentage back to Yellow. We had to check a box, Yes  or No . And we had to think about what was being communicated to us. A big loan was looming. Debt was looming. And the effects of Yellow's business maneuverings were placed on our table. We were asked to cover for the company. But the fact was, we were nothing more than contractual employees, a workforce that was weakly represented. And as Yellow made its big sales pitch in break rooms and conference rooms, there was a whole lot to think about. Could these choices amount to us really going out of business? Will we lose our jobs depending on our vote? Do we have the power to save the company with concessions? Can we afford to be back on the street? Are we just a scared band? Are we just cutting our own throats?

And like easy prey, we lost more ground. We conceded. Somebody had to pay for all of these synergies, somebody had to throw their cash into the carrier acquisition kitty. Somebody had to pay for the Yellow business plan. And as we watched our salaries go backwards, and as we watched our pensions slip away, some of us needed a fact reminder. The fact was our stations could be worse. There were other workers here at Yellow, real people working right next to us. And these people were getting paid less than us. And some of these people were already full scale. They were doing the exact same job within the same workplace. And what was truly disgusting about the whole Yellow process is that these people were receiving less pay than us. Like temps or casuals stuck in the mud, they were essentially part of another sub-community of workers. We were all doing the same job, night after night, year after year. Yet, they were contracted differently. How did that miserable condition happen especially in a unionized workplace? The better question was, how was it allowed to happen?

There is an old-fashioned notion that might not apply here, it's called "Equal Pay for Equal Work." Maybe it's specific to the women's work movement, and maybe it shouldn't be considered a staple of a healthy work environment. I do know this however, if left unfixed, it breeds resentment. Coworkers ask questions about it. Questions like: What makes those guys so fucking special? I've been here a few years, and I'm full scale, what's going on? Why am I making less per hour while we're both doing the exact same job, in the same place? Why the hell should I be productive? How long will my lower tier pay continue? Indefinitely?

Maybe that community of workers is not worth thinking about. Maybe the safe approach is to count your blessings and to take inventory of what you have. Forget about them. Dismiss their condition. Dismiss their future.

In actual working space the whole thing stunk. How do you effectively work next to someone and justify Unequal Pay for Equal Work? There was another community of workers at Yellow, and these newer jobs were going in the wrong direction, right into the dirt. Looking back, the whole thing is embarrassing especially within a unionized backdrop. And that's all it was, just a backdrop, no substance, no principle of one contract for all. How is there not one contract for everyone at a place that has been around a long, long time? How can workers be excluded within a big union barn? Forget ideals, is the place unionized or not? If it really is a union, then behave like one. Also, is the practice of unequal pay for equal work in one work location discriminatory? It is or it isn't. There should be no ambiguity to it whatsoever. A working contract by design should be simple to look at, crystal clear, and all inclusive. That's part of its power. Otherwise, it's just a turd. How it was allowed to exist is nothing short of bewildering.

So, what's the message? That if you're on the rock bottom, then you deserve a rock bottom looking white paper piece of shit contract? And that's your station? That you don't deserve to belong to the other community of workers, the guys doing the same job right next to you? Maybe some of us weren't seeing it correctly. I do know what my eyes were telling me. It was truly amazing discriminatory bullshit, more

Yellow/Teamster bullshit that had piled up over the years. Some workers in the terminal wouldn't shy away from talking about these things. Other workers in the terminal, the ones who would mentally masturbate on their phones every chance they got, those workers were preoccupied. They were busy. But the men in this room were tuned differently. They were paying attention to events around them.

The aforementioned is just a small sample size of the language getting tossed about on this last day. But it was a professional crowd. And despite all the smaller details we might disagree on, we all seemed to agree on the big things. And as the docket dried up, we knew that it was time to wrap this thing up. It was time for everyone to push in. If you have something to say, then go ahead and say it. A voice that had remained silent took his turn.

*“The whole Yellow thing is just a lesson in class warfare.”*

It was a pure shot of whiskey. He had put it out there. The senior men in this room know this language. We've heard it before. We also know where it can go.

There is a language at 813, and somewhere within that language is a baked-in element. Events can trigger it within speech. It can be swept aside as mere nonsense, pure conspiracy theory rhetoric. It might sound absurd to other people who don't share the Yellow experience. But weaving through the collective dock language at Yellow is the notion that something is working against us, that forces are hard at work to try and take wealth out of our hands and place it elsewhere. With enough of an opening, those forces will go for the coup de gras. Unfounded or not, it's a notion that hasn't dissipated over the years. And because of this thing's invisibility (whatever it is), there is nothing we can do about it. Maybe this element is a strange by-product of a long succession of let downs. Maybe it's a blend of beliefs, paranoia, intuition, fatigue, and a lack of trust. How pervasive is it? That's anybody's guess. Maybe it's just confined to the Tracy terminal. But it's very real. I've listened to it many times, from several different voices. And that element which grasps for meaning was here in this room. It was building energy as the conversation moved towards a conclusion. What came next was no surprise. A softer voice said,

*“All of it is just the redistribution of wealth.  
That’s America.”*

There it was in plain English, scaled down with an addendum. It lingered while the expressions remained plain. No eyebrows were raised. There were no objections, nor were there any rebuttals. If there was a conclusion to the exchange of ideas, it’s safe to say that the meeting ended there.

It was hard to make sense of everything. We did however play by the rules. I never once suspected anybody here of doing damage to the company. The people here were all genuinely Yellow, and they had tried their best. For many of us, it was time to take our working experiences with us and get back out on the working street.

## 11 | Ending Inexperience

Before the rollout, 813 outbound dock workers had a keen awareness of what they were handling. They saw many of the same accounts every shift and they understood the specifics of that freight, how and when it could be safely double stacked, when to use logistic bars, whether the freight required inspection, if it was freight susceptible to damage, when was the best time to load the shipment or possibly hold it, if it was a volume shipment how to work in other freight over or around it, and how to load shipments and work them over the course of a trailer in order to prevent overloads and leaners. This is just to name a few dock qualities that are specific to outbound loading that experienced crews adjust to while stripping satellite and city pick up trailers. This aspect of the terminal never should have been tampered with, nor compromised.

An outbound dock worker at a major consolidation center needs to bring more than just a CDL to the LTL dock game, it needs more than people right out of trucking school, it needs more than people who are trained by other drivers (seasoned or not) to start working freight in a big dumb way within a place that they are not equipped, a place where they simply do not belong. The game of continuous puzzle building should always aim to be a game of correct motion and correct decision making. All junior personnel, and especially those who are effectively lost, need to stay on the inbound. We've discussed that there is a progression inside big terminals, and that there are rules. Those rules benefit the terminal, they benefit employees, and they benefit customers. In its last stages, Yellow decided to rewrite the LTL playbook. It decided to rely on a gamble, a gamble that placed gross inexperience in high impact areas, areas that could profoundly affect the Yellow system. That type of reckless gamble can also affect freight on gross levels especially if the amount of actors doing the damage remains irresponsibly high.

In Tracy, there were several accounts that required professional handling. Placing those accounts within weak inexperienced hands was a risky venture. It was way beyond a big roll of the dice, unless those dice were loaded. Maybe it was worth the risk

for those who were behind the lens, and those people who designed the rollout. Now the company is gone. And it's time for ownership. It's time to own this ugly thing. Right now, the design of the rollout is the exclusive property of Yellow Corporation. It left a bad stain. And there was significant damage to people and products. But Yellow Corporation entered this territory at its own peril. The barn in Tracy not only became sick, but it also became unbalanced and vulnerable. Its defenses were down. Its collective hands-on ability to protect the freight and forward it on a responsible basis was lacking. Its freight abilities had become poor especially within its most critical nighttime hours. And within that graveyard window, there was freight folly everywhere. Why is that important?

As the loads took on ugly features, and as the terminal continued to act in a poor manner, the perception of many senior workers who were paying attention had changed. Collectively, too much of the rollout was beyond the realm of strange. With years to figure this thing out, if genuine, the rollout should have been a well-oiled machine. Workers should have fallen into place on a correct basis. The big roll-out should have been razor sharp where the Tracy terminal could effectively guarantee its ability to maintain outbound load integrity while staying productive. Instead, a business carnival emerged. 813 became a place full of oddities, a place full of ugly creations and shifting doors, a place full of stray freight and shipping mysteries, a place full of broken-down forklifts, a place that was adept at getting behind, and a place that used an emergency lifeline which called in more strange faces to get current. And the strangeness continued. It became incessant. The late night actions of more and more out-of-house workers continued. Like a broom, they moved awkwardly over a flat plane, and they fit in awkward pieces into misplaced doors 5 nights a week. Yet, Yellow Corporation held on tightly to this awkward tool. And night after night it continued to sweep over the whole operation. Its bristles worked premium satellite freight into trailers in a most destructive manner.

Yellow Corporation chose to blend Yellow and Reddaway workers together and subsequently erect a carnivalesque work venue in Tracy. The company rolled out a new process. This new Yellow venue was a far departure from the familiar, more akin to

some distorted house of mirrors, a place where onlookers are reminded that everything is fine, just follow the prompts on your computer and get your freight in. Our first act of the night is a sideshow performance of out-of-house workers, but don't be concerned with them. If you arrive at some strange misplaced door, don't be alarmed by what you see, even if what you're looking at appears to be contrary to what you were taught. This is the new direction of the company. Isn't it grand?

Unfortunately, carnivals can be brief. They can fold up their tents quickly, make their money, and move to a new town, sometimes overnight, even before anybody knows what has really happened.

To the lay reader, it might all be passed off as . . . So what? That's life. But there is a question that continues to hover over Yellow Corporation, even if its business sarcophagus has been sealed tight. Was Yellow part of the transportation sector? It was or it wasn't. There's no wiggle room here. If it wasn't part of the sector, then its final death roll may have been nothing of interest even if it offers a glimpse into a grotesque corporate playbook. And maybe the old LTL cow needed to go anyway. It was time. But even if it was time, we still have the problem of customers who relied on Yellow to move their products, month after month, year after year. Yellow Freight was packed with shipments that customers were expecting all the way to its final days. And damage was occurring on massive levels. Freight integrity is part of the business. Whether it was time to shut down or not, there lingers the smell of customer deception to the whole Yellow process.

In rollout Tracy, the trailers didn't lie. They told an undeniable freight story. The rollout design promoted the gross development of bad cube. This running problem was passed off as business as usual. Some were so bold to say that this bad cube building endeavor was the future at Yellow. And in some twisted up strange irony, they were right. The end was expedited by a foulness in thinking, and a foulness in execution. And with such retardation comes an eminent paralysis. Nobody on the decision making end of it all was adult enough to confront the problem head on. The ogre was never addressed. It was all button lipped. And then the game ended. Therefore, every person in management, all the way down to the most junior person, must be considered

complicit, whether they were aware of what was happening or not. That might sound a bit harsh even if a manager was completely clueless to what was really going on at Yellow. But people kept the train running according to plan, according to the rollout design. They reinforced directives on a daily basis.

Managers were just tools. Dock workers can safely admit that they were just doing what they were told. They were assigned work. They were following the computer. And they were encouraged to load as much of their freight as they could. Real simple stuff. With managers, the phrase . . . *we were just doing what we were told*. . . . might seem to be a justified position especially if they couldn't see the gross effects of false directives and false designs. But with Yellow management, *we were just doing what we were told* is a much harder sell. The whole thing gets hazy and speculative once we move away from the flat plane motions of the contractual workforce, especially when we consider that the Yellow management team signed off in a quiet way. Other than some dock workers, hostlers, and drivers, there were no dissident voices. There was no push back. At least none that we could see.

Not only did Yellow operate poorly, but it was going out of its way to operate poorly. The ill-fated designs that were placed on the dock at Tracy, and the relentless poor results that emerged from stressing those designs, were beyond suggestive. It was beyond the realm of dumb. The design had to be a calculation because there was too much time to think over all the moving parts and all the components within that design. The runway to set the whole thing up was too long. And most troubling, the design was not geared for achieving success at building adequate cube. Rather, the implementation of the rollout design encouraged poor running cube. It was a guarantee at maintaining the incessant building of poor cube on an outbound door basis. It was a collective action that was contrary to what was healthy for an LTL carrier. It was thrown down on the dock in Tracy and reinforced by a management team. Somehow they justified a false design that placed dock inexperience directly in front of dock experience. High impact freight was treated in a backwards fashion. People were out of place, and other people simply did not belong on this flat working plane. They were foreign and many of them didn't have the outbound chops. And sadly, nobody stood up for what was correct

at such a critical phase. And the running damage became intense. Time stepped in. Days became weeks, and weeks became months. Soon it was game over. The shit hit the fan and it was too late to speak up. It was too late to stand up for what was correct.

If you were a Yellow employee, and you weren't out west, then what could you possibly really know about the collapse of Yellow? Were you even aware that this was the front line?

Consider that utility drivers were the first ones to the trailer trough. They had the first picks at premium satellite trailers. Yellow opted for them first. They had the first shot to directly affect trailers every evening in a large impactful way. The amount of freight saved for them ensured it. The strip doors reserved for them ensured it. The bids ensured it. The normal outbound crew had been obliterated. And Yellow Corporation chose **not to** give those high impact trailers to the proven commodities that they already had on site. Yellow Corporation chose to sidestep its foundation of experienced outbound dock working professionals. Tracy already had a surplus of available in-house commodities that were adept at maintaining running outbound loads on a responsible business basis. Remember, what was the business? What made Yellow unique? It wasn't the trucking aspect of the business. The LTL game is to gather shipments, build adequate cube with those shipments, and effectively push them through the system of terminals on a customer friendly basis. But there was massive folly in early system handlings.

With all the time in the world to get this thing right, and to roll out an effective business plan, Yellow Corporation chose to throw away the learning cycle and integrate a new process where inexperience would lead the way into the future. But the dominoes started to fall. The outbound trailers were being loaded up nightly on an out-of-responsible-control basis. And unfortunately, many of the best performers in Tracy, many workers that the company had leaned on for years to maintain adequate outbound cube, no longer were interested in participating with the new Yellow vision. The semblance of a traditional outbound operation had been torn apart. The work they once knew was gifted elsewhere. Unfamiliar faces were working premium (system affecting) satellite trailers first and the outbound work trough had been altered. Utility

drivers went to the top of the freight working roster, they had first dibs on that work even though they had no collective dock working experience especially at a big terminal like Tracy. The whole thing was backwards, and it was ultra-toxic.

The guards were gone. The company and the union allowed this buzzard to fly. New work rules were set, work rules that effectively threw Tracy's active seniority roster right into the dock working toilet. Let's not forget that many utility drivers were brand-new employees, and suddenly a big swath of them arrived in Tracy in late night hours. They brought satellite trailers to 813, hopped on a forklift, and worked that freight on the big flat 813 plane. They were told to empty out their trailers. They were told to stuff their freight into other trailers. That was the new business plan. That was the design. And what a design it was! Big shots at Yellow agreed on it unless we assume that the whole thing just happened by chance. In freight reality, there had to be an assortment of collaborators at Yellow Corporation.

Opposed to that business obscenity were the high impact dock workers, people that had seniority numbers on the Tracy seniority roster. They had hire dates and anniversaries. They were home grown people who knew the Tracy dock jungle through and through. They were people who could keep building fine loads all shift long. That's what they brought to the table. And they were people who didn't really participate within the rollout process because the premium work was mostly gone. Now there were other things to do, like cleaning up behind others, or going to grab less significant strips, to merely blend into the operation, and to do as the company told them. If there is a positive aspect to the sidelining of Tracy's premium dock workers, it's the fact that all those dock workers are off the hook. They are in no way responsible for the collapse of the carrier. It was effectively out of their hands. That's the whole point. They were minimized; therefore, they aren't complicit in any way. But there is a community out there that is not only complicit, but they're on the hook. They're on the hook even if they play the dumb card, that the business had gotten away from them, and that they tried their best, but they just didn't know any better. They were stalwarts at best practices. They just didn't have enough time to pull off their big system wide rollout business plan, or their little business caper.

Why would any responsible business opt for inexperienced workers and attach them to a puzzle building operation especially if those people have not stepped onto the outbound puzzle building curve yet? If an individual has no experience they shouldn't be attached to the operation, unless that business is looking for trouble, because all the business is doing is creating more senseless jobs of waste. Yellow big shots decided to throw the learning cycle right into the trash. And of course, once the big rollout emerged onto the flat working plane in Tracy, poor results immediately came. It overwhelmed the terminal in many ways.

The fact is people either have experience or they don't. A person who has experience, and done a job repeatedly with an obvious aptitude, is a proven commodity. An inexperienced person is not a proven commodity. The act of doing something repeatedly until aptitude and/or mastery is achieved is next level stuff in any endeavor. Sometimes the wise course of action is to let it run and not get in its way. At that level, little coaching is needed, if any. Little supervision is needed, if any.

An experienced puzzle builder of high caliber can wipe out a bay and appropriately fit pieces into a running cube like it's a walk in the park. They can do several tasks within a given area of command. They can transition into high gear once they decide on how to attack a load door. They visualize the load to be, then decide how to proceed. And so long as the tools are available, logistic bars, dunnage, air bags, etc., they'll work in bayed up freight and newer arrivals and adequately fill in trailer space on an optimum level while maintaining work speed if required. Rest time for a person of this caliber is important, often they work on a precalculated stop and go basis. Their ability to accelerate and slow down is much different than the rest of the operation where pace is required. They think their way around their work areas which makes sense, since their work areas are nothing more than multiple door puzzle building ventures. Each person has their own style, and so long as the puzzles come together on a freight friendly and high cube basis, everything else is a minor consideration. Some guys like heavy bays, some prefer half full bays. But none of them shy away from choice. They like to see options.

What should never happen is for the best puzzle builders in large terminals to be traveling all over the dock, to essentially be out of position all shift long. Puzzle builders don't need to spend any time getting involved in wasted motion because a rash of directives exist within a defunct model where flexibility is the business norm. They don't need to spend time correcting misloads. They don't need to waste time reworking overloads nor should they spend time reworking poorly loaded trailers. Puzzle builders don't need to spend any time training new employees because turnover is so high. They don't need to spend time getting a city bill before they can drop off a shipment in the city operation. They don't need to do dock pick-ups. They don't need to waste time waiting to ask somebody a question about a route, about a load door, about an appointment, about a liftgate, or anything specific to the city operation. Puzzle builders don't need to go to the city at all. Nor do they need to go to the inbound. Puzzle builders don't need to get involved in any terminal misadventures, nor any clerical shortcomings, nor any miniature investigations, nor anything unspecific to their given work area. They don't need to spend any time going to a far part of the dock. What they do need is to remain fixed within a position that is packed with meaning relative to the business, a position that directly affects that which is most critical to the business, success at maintaining adequate running cube. It's high impact work which the company seeks to involve them in, because the company has a keen awareness to where exactly the crux of the operation is within large terminals that have large outbound operations. Puzzle builders simply need to build 3 dimensional puzzles, to remain fixed, and to fill cubes on an unhindered basis with all tools readily available. They need to see the same experienced faces specific to their working crew all shift long, nothing more.

There are 2 big steps. Fix the model and leave experienced puzzle builders alone. Instead of focusing on collectively pushing freight into outbound trailers, we must first ensure that a position exists that is better equipped to make better puzzle building decisions, a position that by design allows for a better work space, as in something that is duty specific, and is filled by someone who has a better track record at puzzle building skills, a position that stays busy at doing that task which is critical to the business. Equally critical, do not allow traditional looking management teams of

inexperience to meddle with anything specific to the model, especially load areas. Trust that the experienced puzzle building dock worker will make enough good decisions in succession over the course of their shift and that their experience will put companies in a new position. Available cube ratios will change. The heading changes. By design, companies need to steer away from empty/perilous space, and to consistently steer towards fuller cube utilization. The key is to fix positions where experienced puzzle builders can be most effective, and to keep inexperienced others away from puzzle building dock workers, thereby allowing them to do their jobs unhindered. If new companies can do that, they can get away from the business of making charitable contributions to gross communities of inexperience.

Unless a barrier is put in place, inexperience will continue to appear and try to attach itself within these systems, to seep its way into the operation, thereby retarding matters. LTL systems can't afford to throw money away, nor can they continue to act like charities. To keep inexperience in place week after week, month after month, is dangerous. LTL systems need to do some very simple things and continue to reinforce those things like a longstanding dogma. Hire adults, adequately train them, identify worker strengths with respect to puzzle building, keep them fixed within a premier model setting, and permanently close the door on inexperience.

To be sure, let's define LTL Experience: *LTL Experience means loading and unloading LTL trailers for many years. Everyone else, all people who have not stepped onto the learning cycle and done the above work remain inexperienced. With respect to the business (remember what the business is, the business is picking up pieces, building 3 dimensional puzzles of cube, taking apart those puzzles, and redistributing those pieces back into the business community), so long as anyone of inexperience continues to make decisions close to ground floor operations, their value is questionable. Within a fixed model, it's just business waste.*

Finally, before setting out to do anything. Before a real vision is considered. Before creating a real puzzle building business, one that respects the learning cycle and benefits the business community, LTL carriers need to grasp the full potential of puzzle

building experience. Those businesses should be asking questions that drive hard at understanding cube and how cube is best created within a large outbound operation. More functional dock designs of fixed experience should be the aim, designs that are fully understood even within the business community. Real business professionals should always be asking themselves two questions.

*Are you LTL experienced?*

*If not, then what are you doing here?*

And if anyone in the industry thinks those two questions don't have any merit, then they should remember . . . . . *Look what happened to Yellow.*

## 12| Dead Lifts

Dead forklifts became part of the roll-out dock scenery. They often sat shift after shift. A new shift would begin, fresh sets of eyes would go looking for a forklift to drive, one curious employee after another. The good lifts disappeared quickly. What remained was a bedraggled selection of tools to drive. Ignitions would be turned over, and sometimes nothing but silence. Failure after failure taking up more and more critical dock space. Sometimes they would sit idle, completely useless. Other times workers would push them towards the center of the dock to sit amongst the main forklift fleet in bays 53, 54, 55, 56, and beyond. Dead lifts also appeared in other areas such as the 66 and 68 bays, the 128, 130, 132, 134, and 136 bays. The 115 bay and adjacent areas near the ramp were also big drop off points for bad forklifts.

Tracy's fleet of forklifts were already aging. Most were still good enough tools to get the job done. And there were several lifts in the fleet that were barely holding on, poor models that could still turn over and get moving across the dock. And then there were all the jalopies that appeared during the roll-out phase. Many of these were forklifts that were not only in poor condition but were a struggle to operate even for a seasoned dock worker. After the whole workable fleet was considered, there were the occasional models that didn't have a computer. A handheld would be required. For some workers, that activity was a virtual waste of time. In any event, the last people who didn't find a decent forklift to drive often got stuck with a poor model, something that may or may not be operable. Driving bad machinery can amount to an unwillingness to fight hour after hour. Bad motors can quickly equate to bad production. For workers who walked the dock and found nothing, then they would simply have to wait.

Finding an adequate forklift was already an observable problem especially during heavy shifts. When the travelers arrived the whole forklift situation became desperate. Workers reacted to it differently. Some workers in Tracy didn't care, they didn't possess a first dog to the trough mentality. If they came to work and didn't get a lift, they would just shut down mentally until something freed up. Whether Tracy dock worker or

Yellow traveler, there were people starting their shift who were finding nothing but dead machinery.

Usually, I found a lift. But there were some shifts when I found nothing. So, I stood and waited. I had no desire to go down to the breakroom in order to chit chat with other workers. I preferred to watch events by the time clock at the top of the stairs. Most workers would return there when they finished up. And even though I was standing around occasionally, I could witness other workers failing to turn a motor over. So, I didn't have to waste my own time doing the same thing. I could also get an unobstructed view of all the people who were coming and going, and to gauge all the good forklifts that might free up. But in the final analysis, travelers had to come first. They needed to have first dibs on running forklifts. They needed to get in motion first. Yellow was flying these guys in here and the word was that the whole traveler fiasco wasn't some cheap adventure. If Yellow was going to bring people in here from around the country in order for us to get caught up, then those people shouldn't be standing around. So, I passed on motors frequently. First, I didn't really care anymore. And second, I might find some other way to be productive like working haz mat or OS&D.

813 was dealt a bad hand. During daylight hours, lower tier managers were very much aware of the dead lift problem. Yellow was making a very poor impression on everyone who was paying attention. Some men who watched it weren't too concerned with working hard, especially when other strange faces stood around burning hours. Who could blame them? Yellow had constructed, intentionally or not, a broken-down carousel full of bad forklift distractions that took up valuable dock space. The dead lift dance was absolute waste. It intensified during heavy traveler periods.

I arrived one day to start my shift. I got in motion with some pre-shift overtime. Dayshift was winding down and it contained a big infusion of travelers. And another big group of travelers was getting ready to start on swing shift as well. Without even doing a count, it was evident that we would be down several lifts right out of the swing shift tailgate. Minutes before we started, a manager and I had done a quick forklift count. The numbers weren't good. I took a stroll down to the city operation just to

make sure. Dead lifts were all over the dock. As I headed back towards the breakroom, a senior day shift worker pulled his forklift up beside me. He told me that when he arrived this morning there wasn't a forklift available for him. He said that he didn't feel like playing Yellow's game this morning. He wasn't in the mood. And he didn't feel like hanging out in the breakroom. Without the tool he needed for the job, he had walked out to the parking lot, got in his car, and took a 2-hour nap. When he came back up to the dock, there were still some guys standing around. Nobody missed him. He admitted that he didn't come to work for this kind of bullshit.

Yellow was acting irresponsibly. The company wasn't responding to a growing problem. If the company did not have any money to fix all these broken-down lifts, then why pay people from other terminals to come into Tracy and have people stand around? Was Yellow a business or not? How could Yellow justify sacrificing labor hours during these periods? The forklifts were lacking, and it couldn't be denied. It was a dire problem, and it was made even more stark with the decision to fly workers in. Clearly something was wrong. Some men were under the impression that Yellow was doing nothing more than throwing away money on gross levels, that the Tracy terminal had become a cash shredding machine. Hours and production were being tossed away on a heavy basis. The whole thing looked completely absurd especially in the face of another big loan.

I didn't focus too much on the available fleet. I wasn't aware of all the nuances and particulars that came with each lift. However, many dock workers were aware of many of the idiosyncrasies specific to each forklift, which ones had bad tires, which ones were smooth rides, which computers were slow, which lifts could overheat, which ones would stall, which ones would just shut down, which ones were prone to leaking, which ones were speedy, which ones had uncomfortable seats, and which ones had good blades. These workers were also aware of which forklifts were not even worthy of consideration, forklifts that would start up but should be avoided. And these were the running lifts. The dead fleet was a different matter. That carousel was scattered about, getting pushed here and there. Those dead lifts that did get pushed out to the garage had the usual landing spots, next to some other lifts that would line up waiting for a mechanic

to look them over. Doing a formal count of all them out at the garage was not my focus. However, I do vividly remember three accounts where I pushed a bad forklift out there. And each time the number of dead forklifts was concerning.

One day a truck driver asked me to push a dead lift out to the garage. So, off we went. I pushed him across the dock, down the ramp, and across the yard. We arrived just outside a side entrance of the garage where other deadlifts were staged. We found a spot and he parked the lift. We talked for a while looking over the dead fleet. There were a few rows of deadlifts just sitting waiting to be worked upon, which this morning was a concern. We would have some guys up on the dock who would be standing around waiting for a motor. The travelers were here, and we were clearly overstaffed. A few managers were scrambling to find working motors.

Not that it was my duty, but something prompted me to make an inquiry. Was anything out here at the garage ready to take back up, as in fixed? It could equate to one less person standing around. I told the driver that I was going inside the garage and that I would be back in a minute. He told me not to go in there, that asking about forklifts was a bad idea. And of course, I should have listened. I walked inside the side entrance, and the place was quiet, nobody in sight. I took a few steps down a hallway and noticed all the mechanics were seated in a room. I poked my head in. Before I could utter a syllable, one of them just shook his head, *No!* The expressions on all the faces let me know not to bother asking. The mood was not good, a few of them looked incensed. I walked out of there quickly. The message was loud and clear. I returned to the yard and told the driver that I wouldn't make that mistake again.

The only thing we could do about the whole forklift dilemma was speculate. Yellow was throwing down big cash on travelers, but the company couldn't solve basic forklift problems? They had the mechanics. Were parts on order? What was going on? Time was of the essence. We had guys on the clock standing around, and we had guys consistently walking the dock, burning time, perusing over a growing number of shabby forklifts. And 813 was no little P&D barn. It was one of Yellow's biggest terminals and it was acting like a complete dullard.

Another day a dock worker asked me to push a dead lift out to the garage. So down the ramp and across the yard we went. As we approached the garage he started shaking his head. He began a loud rant about how all these lifts parked out here were nothing but junk, and that the company needed to get rid of all of them. He kept on his rant as I pushed him into an open spot. He set the brake, hopped off the lift, and he began looking over all the dead lifts. He continued to shake his head as he rambled on about how everything out here just needs to be thrown away. He wasn't shy about telling other workers about how too many of our forklifts were pure crap. I had heard this rant before, and this morning I didn't interrupt him. He needed to vent. Besides, I had to respect his opinion in the matter of good versus bad forklifts. He knew the difference. Like several other dock workers, he knew exactly what he was looking at. He studied our lifts.

This guy was a little champ, a total creature of habit. Some nights it would be slow on the dock. Most of the forklift fleet sat idle scattered about in front of the stairs that led down to the main breakroom. During break times while workers would be resting downstairs, this guy would line up all the lifts and perfectly park them side-by-side, like the dock was a showroom floor. The crew would drift up from break and find the whole idle fleet ready for inspection. It was more than just some funny occasional habit. He was always overlooking the equipment.

He was an early bird and usually was one of the first dock workers to arrive in the evening. He'd walk into the terminal and begin his same routine, his same walk down the stairs to the main breakroom. He'd get some things out of his locker, maybe eat an early meal, get his work clothes organized, grab a cup of coffee, then head back upstairs to the dock ready to go. Other workers would start to drift in. They'd all mingle and talk while dropping their goods on forklifts. Eyeballs would be everywhere looking over every parked lift in the area. Workers would grab blue cleaning rags and share bottles of disinfectant spray. Each worker would find their lift of choice or they would wait for some worker in motion who would pass off the usual lift, same worker to same worker, same connection night after night. However a lift was found, each worker would inspect their lift of choice and begin the routine

of cleaning and chatting. Seats would get wiped down, steering wheels, knobs, mirrors, computer screens, and other parts of the outer shell that might be greasy. They would finish cleaning up minutes before the start of the shift, disengage their shop talk, and most workers would head downstairs for the tailgate. In the breakroom, many workers had their same seat at the same table, year after year.

These were the people who knew the fleet. They knew nuances to each lift, who preferred which lift, which lifts to avoid, and especially which lifts weren't even worth the time to drive. And if these workers made a remark about a particular forklift, especially if the lift wasn't worth the time, then it wasn't worth the time. I had gone down that trial-and-error road. They were always correct in their assessments. They knew these tools and they cared for them. They watched the forklift fleet in Tracy like a cast of hawks.

I noted one more trip to the garage, this time with a non-contractual, someone who had been with the company a long time. He had been in lower management for many years and like me he was older. He was the terminal's weights and inspections specialist, and he was aware of the condition and the workings of the forklift fleet. One of his job requirements was to calibrate the forklift scales and to zero them out. Of course, he worked with everyone who was in motion at some point, even it was something simple like asking one of us to take several skids out of a particular trailer, setting freight on the dock for inspection, or moving skids to one side and arranging a trailer in a way so he could walk or crawl around inside the trailer length. He was busy measuring, taking pictures, going through paperwork, considering classifications, and considering volume shipments. If he was not wandering the dock and looking inside trailers, he might be behind a computer screen at one of the towers, or he might be tucked back in his office.

Some nights he would suddenly appear. He would catch me on the dock and remind me that there was a full pot of coffee. Sometimes at my breaktime I would park my forklift, walk down a hallway, and take a seat inside of his office. Once or twice a week we would get together for a good chat. No heavy talk. Sometimes he had a good joke

waiting for me. But over time, I got to know this guy. He was a talker, and most times he would carry the conversation. We shared a few interests. So, seldom did we ever talk about how sideways Yellow had become.

One morning he asked me to push a dead forklift out to the garage. So down the ramp and across the yard we went. We pulled up to the west side of the garage where a few aisles of bad forklifts sat. He parked the lift, dismounted, and right away he began making notes on a clipboard. I sat on my lift for a while, I was in no mood to hurry back up to the dock. I was curious, however. There were more than just a few lifts out here. I decided to count them up. He was still engaged with some notes on his clipboard as I sat silent on my forklift. I didn't want to disturb him, he was busy. But I did finally break the silence. I told him that I was counting 18 forklifts. He didn't respond, he just kept looking down like he hadn't heard me. I decided to get out of neutral and drive back up to the dock. Just as I was getting in motion, without looking up he said,

*“There's more around the corner.”*

I drove away thinking to myself that he needed some space, he had a lot on his mind. Not only was he in a bad mood, but he looked genuinely pissed off. He wouldn't even make eye contact with me. All of it was strange. The talker wasn't talking this morning.

I had no confidence that the place would last much longer. 813 had quickly degraded. The terminal had become an OS&D nightmare and wild freight was everywhere. The loads on outbound doors were still running out of control, and the loads coming in from the system were still substandard. Weak directives continued to be encouraged. With more and more new utility drivers showing up working satellite freight that should have been reserved for experienced others, my gut was telling me that this place was probably on a short timeline. Graveyard would most likely be my last bid at Yellow.

The cross-dock directive was working a magic, especially if the order was to get a bunch of independent actors running their shipments into trailers, then to scurry them back to their own strip trailer. Haste was making waste, and many of those performers were not taking responsibility for their freight. Within a large terminal, items can quickly get lost. They can also be forgotten about if not corrected by the person responsible for it. A seasoned dock worker will try not to add to the stray freight problem. With regards to the shipments they strip, it is a one and done process. If it goes into a trailer, it's clean. If it hits a bay, it's clean and easy to identify. When they finish a strip, the whole area is clean. When they leave a takeover, they try to keep bills complete with no partials left around the dock. And if a partial order is left in the strip, then a note is attached to it giving the next dock worker a heads up to where the rest of the shipment has been loaded or bayed up. The whole area is clean, no mysteries are left behind, nothing is strewn about, and the paperwork (if any at all) is left on the checker stand. But in the end, this wasn't even close to being standard dock protocol. For the responsible dock working crowd that was still on hand at 813, they could only invest so much of their own time cleaning up after a growing horde of other workers. It was not their job. And it wasn't their responsibility.

I might spend a few hours a night working stray freight around the inbound tower. And while cleaning it up, more stray freight would arrive. Dockworker after dockworker would arrive with more questions, more unknowns, more strays, more lost items, more mysterious overages, and more things found needing further research. The periphery of the tower became a collection zone for wild freight. And some nights it would build quickly. The goal around the tower was to identify everything we could, ship it, and try to avoid adding to the big mess behind the dock office. The inbound tower couldn't become like OS&D, an area which held aisle after aisle of lost shipments, shipments just sitting on some flat space waiting for a clerk to do some research. This area had burgeoned to the point of pressing into the city operation. It became a massive embarrassment of freight, freight that customers had been expecting, freight that sat collecting dust.

But stray freight was not just appearing around the tower, it was also appearing all over the dock. And it was picking up a bad momentum. Little messes would form. Eventually, they'd become eyesores. Some nights I'd grab an empty pallet and go door to door, picking up pole freight, picking up stray freight around garbage cans, picking up partial freight that was left behind from a by-gone strip trailer. There were landing spots all over the dock for shipments getting left behind. Loose unlabeled cartons of hardware would gather, more and more daft pieces, more lost attachments, more cartons left around poles, and more incomplete orders that some paying customer was expecting. Much of that freight had already lost its integrity. Items were left in between trailers, left around the dumpster, left by parked forklifts, left by staircases, left by middle sections of open dock, left by stacks of dunnage and deck bars, and left by other odd corners within the dock operation. These weren't mountains of freight, much of it was just little droppings, mere things to just walk right by like they didn't exist. Some workers would just go about their business and work around it, with no investigation at all.

But I got tired of looking at it. I also got tired of picking it up especially if I knew who generated it. The place was too damn big. The problems were too damn big. However, there were a few older dock workers on graveyard who addressed the stray freight problem directly. One worker from the inbound crew stepped up during the week. He was always tidy and quick to grab a broom whenever a trailer needed sweeping out, or whenever a mess suddenly emerged. His style was always cordial, and he was never afraid to wear a smile. Some evenings he would help with the pole freight. He would cruise up and down aisles picking up little messes left behind by laxed others. He would return to the tower with a full pallet of little mysteries for some clerk to solve. Tracy had a littering problem, and the litter was poorly tendered customer freight of gross neglect. It was a dirty little secret.

There was no point in getting involved with inbound strips anymore. Even if I were issued a strip on the inbound, it was only a matter of time before someone would ask for assistance with a pending disaster in some trailer. A manager might tell me a door number where some worker had come to an impasse. A worker might not be quite sure

how to proceed with saving something that was in peril. We might discuss the problem for a while, but often I would just drive in with my forklift and handle it directly. Usually, I would explain how to solve the problem, especially if it was something like coming in at an angle, bringing in blades to one side, side shifting, or understanding where the center of gravity was before proceeding. If an item was fully broken, it might be a lost cause. But sometimes by slowing down and thinking about it, the junior worker could grasp it and put it in their work toolbox. Many of the workers could drive fast, they could push freight around all night long, but saving items within poorly loaded strip trailers could be troublesome.

Tracy had spun out of responsible control. Taking a step back and viewing a poorly run corporation, sometimes an employee can only make sense of matters on a small level. And for myself, as Yellow was bleeding out, all I was really doing was cleaning up the messes left by others. It was a working behavior on my part that should have never happened. It was a waste of time, and it was a waste of effort.

If Yellow Corporation had any ability at all to identify and build on its available strengths rather than promote a weaker LTL standard, then what should have happened? What should Yellow have done with its most experienced workers? For starters, high impact players should have been working high impact trailers so that the system remained operationally healthy. To tinker with that was dangerous. That should have never changed. Why monkey with that aspect of the operation unless those workers had become completely unproductive?

Maybe money didn't matter. Maybe profitability was an insignificant variable at Yellow. The company was more than willing to just toss it away, which was very strange during its last few years because more money was exchanging hands in a big way. The federal government put its hooks in the company and the piper would come calling soon enough on that one. Where was that loan payback money going to come from? From staying in process? From getting behind again and again, then making decisions to fly in more travelers? To keep cycling in more utility drivers and continue to have them build more three-dimensional aberrations that would be pushed deep into the

system? Maybe Yellow Corporation could ask its workers to make more pay concessions.

Where was this big reserve of cash going to come from? From a business that did nothing more than stumble and fumble its way around the LTL sector? From an old LTL trucking company that month after month could not even figure out where to place its doors, even within a simple inbound operation? From a corporation that knew how to buy more trucking outfits, but a corporation that couldn't solve problems like fixing dead forklifts? From a business that continued to engage in some big rollout while load quality spun out of control? From a business that threw down an ugly dock design that in real working dock space was nothing more than an absolute mess?

Government involvement is a head scratcher. \$700 million was handed over. And between the mish mashing of more seniority rosters, the ultimate failure to protect that roster from out-of-house workers, the traveler expense to clean up matters, the desecration of quality, and the desecration of responsible dock operating procedures within a large west coast consolidation center, Yellow Corporation was in deep. They were committed to this ugly thing. However it was directed, the company could not throw away money fast enough.

Even if it was an emergency loan, regardless of all intention going in, the federal government had a stake in the game. No matter how that activity is interpreted, it happened. The feds either made money off Yellow or they didn't. If the government did, then it was a reckless decision. They should never have touched this company. Best case scenario, the feds went in blindly, completely unaware of the practices encouraged by Yellow Corporation. Perhaps the feds didn't do any research whatsoever. But it must be mentioned, and it cannot be avoided. They lined up with Yellow Corporation, and even if indirectly, they became involved. They entered the books. If a shield is provided because of that association, we learn from it and leave it all behind.

Our focus is on the real Yellow people, experienced people who did the work. Some of the men from that camp have a new impression. Working hard might not amount to

much at all. If exploitation takes the veil of best business practices, then all bets are off. Social norms can get broken down. People can get broken down. They're only human.

Blunders happen, as in big losses. To blame yourself might be an entirely misplaced exercise. You can tell yourself that you never should've never gotten involved with a company like Yellow, Roadway, or Reddaway. But the workers didn't know. It wasn't a blunder on the part of the worker. Workers couldn't predict the future. None of them could know what direction Yellow Corporation was headed. But to be sure, no dock worker and no truck driver should ever look inward and blame themselves with respect to Yellow's poor direction, especially if those workers were giving the job an honest effort. Workers tried, and that was the best they could do. Everything else was far beyond their control. Nobody on the Yellow ground floor should ever look in the mirror and begin to make sense of Yellow's collapse due to what they did while driving a forklift or driving a tractor. What they should understand, and never forget, is they may have stepped on some very bad ground and not even known it. Even if employees worked at an adequate and professional level, were the working orders and designs at Yellow of such a poor nature that all work effort was bound for failure? What was the real direction? Yellow may have been nothing more than a business sand hole, the big corporate version of the antlion and the ant that tries to work its way out of the hole. The whole thing may have been a waste of energy, especially if the antlion was throwing more sand in front of the insect, the soon to be victim that was giving all its energy to try to dig its way out of the hole, an effort in futility.

That was the job. It may have all been inevitable. If the place was designed to fail, then we can sum up the Yellow vision as . . . . mission accomplished.

Without direct experience, items like pain and suffering are hard to measure. Some people are tough, they're wired differently. However, damage is another item. Yellow workers may have acquired damage without even being aware of it. And for those who are near ruined levels, it follows that many of them will haul baggage around with them, maybe for a long time. They might even use their work experience to make sense of the business world around them, that other big corporations have standard

operating procedures that mirror Yellow's. It might be what to expect around the next corner. I personally know several people who were severely damaged by their whole Yellow experience. Who would even begin to know how it will affect them in another work environment, even if they are fortunate enough to find a good landing spot?

For those Yellow people who were spread out around the country, maybe it was a good thing that the rollout never came your way. Being away from it had its benefits. But out west, the front line of this thing was stressful, and it was ugly. Barns like 813 had their own stories, their own accounts. But never forget that a flat working plane out west was effectively breached. It wasn't protected at all. And maybe after reading this, it might make some sense despite all the confusion that still surrounds Yellow.

Let's give credit where credit is due. Let's acknowledge those people who gave it a real effort all the way to the end, even when the place was taking in water. Workers did what they were told. They followed directives. They followed computer prompts. And they continued to show up and do their part despite all of the rollout absurdities.

So, to the real Yellow people, thank you for your time. I salute you.

The end.