

## **Promoting Safe Work in the Public Transport Sector**

Public transport is one of the essential services which is to be highly valued in any community. Those who are engaged in this sector, whether as owners, management, administrators, mechanics, service personnel and operators of vehicles, all have a responsibility to the travelling public. The contribution of workers in this sector must be appreciated and not taken for granted. Operation of the transport service is critical to the productivity of the economy, for it is essential to the movement of people to and from work, recreation and other purposes.

Those who work as drivers and conductors are those employees who come into direct contact with members of the public on a daily basis. It is expected that they would want to display discipline in how they execute their duties and in their deportment. The respect which these workers earn from the public can be heavily influenced by how they present and conduct themselves. Inasmuch that pride and dignity is associated with work, it is reasonable to assume that workers would want to function in a manner that they earn the appreciation and support of the travelling public.

With much of the indiscretions, indiscipline and infractions said to be perpetrated by the drivers of public transport vehicles, it is left to wonder whether these individuals are conscious or care about the awesome responsibility entrusted to them. It is a cause for concern if these individuals while carrying out their daily duty, are unaware that the safety and lives of commuters depend largely on them, following good driving practices and observing the provisions of the road traffic regulations. The drivers have an added responsibility to ensure that their actions on the roads do not endanger other members of the travelling public, whether persons are users of vehicles or pedestrians.

Acts of reckless driving, driving without due care and attention, driving under the influence of alcohol and breaches of the Road Traffic Act and regulations, potentially place members of the travelling public at risk or inconvenience. Despite the best intentions, such indiscipline has remained common place in the Barbados public transport sector. Workers in this sector must assume responsibility for their actions and therefore cannot expect to have the sympathy of the general public if such indifference becomes the norm. It is unbelievable that despite the mounting of cameras along the roadways, the capturing of indifferent acts which are uploaded to social media, the constant appeals from the Royal Barbados Police Force and the Road Safety Association, that there is still a failure for operators of public transport vehicles to exhibit proper conduct on the roads. This is a culture which the route taxis better known as ZRs and mini buses have inculcated and show little signs of changing.

Workers in any environment are expected to function based on the observance of rules, regulations and procedures. Where there are breaches, it is not unusual for the employer to institute some form of disciplinary action. Where an employer or management fails to act, it may be determined that they are either disinterested or complicit. In fairness to employers and managers, they ought to have monitoring systems in place so as to ensure compliance. In attempting to address the problem of the recklessness and indifference, it is expected that

enforcement of the law and regulations would be the solution. It is therefore mind boggling as to why this seems not to be effective.

Members of the travelling public can play a pivotal role in addressing the problem by refraining from encouraging the transgression by drivers. This includes driving recklessly, speeding, overloading of buses, stopping indiscriminately on the roadway, (other than at a bus stop), stopping to pick up and set down passengers at pedestrian crossings, not stopping in the laybys provided for the pick up and setting down of passengers, permitting the dangerous act of having two buses stopping abreast in roadway, travelling off route and the playing of music on the buses. In all of these instances the safety of passengers and other road users are being placed at risk. It is important that workers in the public transport sector especially drivers, understand that their contribution is valued. However, they must also be aware that their actions do not constitute to promoting safe work.

Least it is forgotten, this problem with the public transport operators is an aged one. It did not have its genesis in the so-called lost decade and neither is it a seven days wonder. Solutions to this problem must be found. There must be a commitment and dedicated will to act. The time for talk and promises of action has long passed. It is time to put policies and systems in place which are backed by serious enforcement measures. One way of controlling the system is to limit the granting of a maximum of two permits to any private owner of a public transport vehicle. The monopoly ownership of vehicles ought not to be encouraged, as this has the potential to breed a number of misgivings. Operators who are found in breach of the Road Traffic Act and Regulations should not be continually given slaps on the wrist for serious and continued road operations breaches.

Owners of the private transport vehicles can take the lead in helping to bring about the changes required. They too must enforce the standards set for operating a public service vehicle. One would think that if they seriously considered that the license to operate which was granted could be readily withdrawn for breaches committed, then they would want to act swiftly to safeguard their investment. It is suggested that a good starting point could be with their hiring and recruitment practices.

**Promoting Safe Work in the Public Transport Sector: DENNIS DE PEIZA: Labour & Employee Relations Consultant, 17 January 2020**