



Dealing with Unpopular Policies

You've heard the saying that the customer is always right, and internally, many view user departments as customers. However, as in retail, you can't always give in to the customer. How do you balance your departmental goals with customers' desires? If there is pushback to new policies, how do you convince your customers they're not always right?

Take, for instance, new technologies such as telematics — drivers seem to hate them, but fleets installing them see a need for them. The same can be said about “green” vehicles, such as compressed natural gas (CNG) and electric vehicles. Drivers may not want to learn how to fill up with CNG, or they may express concerns about range on electric vehicles. I recall one fleet manager saying his customers complained about the gas smell in a motor pool CNG sedan. I'm sure the list of complaints is endless.

Proclaiming “I know best” doesn't really work, and “deal with it” won't gain you any allies. So what's the solution?

What's In It for Them?

One way to convince customers to get on board with fleet changes they initially dislike is to let them know how it's beneficial for them. Kelly Reagan, fleet administrator, City of Columbus, Ohio, has been able to convince user departments and fleet staff to make changes despite their initial reluctance.

To convince police officers that anti-idling devices on their vehicles were a good idea, fleet staff explained that they would reduce fuel consumption without impeding officers' ability to take off after another vehicle right away. They also agreed to transition to SUVs for the patrol fleet. Reagan convinced user departments, and even technicians, that using aftermarket parts would save them money. In moving to CNG trucks, fleet staff told department heads it would save them on fuel costs, was a cleaner-burning fuel, and was domestically produced. And when telling doesn't work, showing does, as was the case with drivers.

“There were drivers out there who had been driving diesel vehicles for years and said CNG doesn't have the power to plow a road. We had to prove them wrong,” Reagan said. “We had to take them out and show them

it has just as much power and torque as a standard diesel engine.”

Who Owns the Fleet Anyway?

John Clements, deputy director of fleet for the City of San Diego, Calif., proposes the following question: Who owns the fleet? Clements explained that ownership means the ability to improve accountability, standardization, and reporting capability. This, of course, makes policy changes much easier.

If fleet owns the vehicles, fleet has the final decision on those vehicles. Clements said this allows fleet to take charge in a number of ways, such as establishing policies and procedures, standardizing purchasing and maintenance, improving vehicle utilization, and effectively tracking vehicle and utilization data.

Ownership means the ability to make decisions about vehicle purchasing and what gets installed on vehicles. A Florida fleet manager once said about telematics use: “It's not the driver's vehicle. It's the city's vehicle, and fleet, as a custodian of the city's assets, can put whatever we need to on that vehicle.”

While the ownership model may not be the way your fleet functions, it's a change that can be made. The Columbus fleet has taken over more control of its vehicles than it had in years past, and the San Diego fleet is advocating for the ownership model and has created an advisory board to get customer input.

Having the final say regarding fleet may be nice, but Clements cautions against ignoring customer concerns.

“In my experience I prefer that the fleet organization have ownership, but not as a dictator,” Clements said. “Rather, the fleet organization with control should form a strong bond with their customers and co-manage fleet vehicles with the advantages that both organizations bring to the table.”

What's your solution to an unpopular policy or change? 🌟

If there is pushback to new policies that fleet implements, how do you convince customers they're not always right?