RAILWAY SUPPLY INSTITUTE
Support, Connection, Advocacy

RSI Quality Newsletter

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LAYOFFS OR LABOR SHORTAGE?

By Debbie Taylor – President – Taylor Transportation Search Group

I've been hearing the same question over and over lately—from hiring managers, industry peers, even candidates who have been in this business for decades:

"So, what is it? Are we dealing with layoffs or a labor shortage?" And my answer is always the same: It's both.

That might sound contradictory, but if you've spent any time in transportation and logistics over the last few years, you know the industry is desperately trying to evolve. We are an industry built on old ways of doing things, long-term careers, and a pace that is slow to change. So, let's take a look at what we see—what's really going on, and more importantly, what it means for the people hiring, the people looking, and the people leading.

Layoffs Are Real—and They're Making Headlines

For quite some time now, we've been seeing and talking about layoffs at both large and small companies. Some very quiet downsizing and some large public downsizing:

- Class 1 railroads announced mechanical staff and tech restructuring layoffs.
- Amtrak released personnel cuts across the board in a cost-reduction initiative.
- Railcar services companies continue to announce restructuring of their workforce.

These aren't small ripples. These are workforce realignments—and they're impacting successful professionals at every level. But, these layoffs aren't always about performance. In many cases, they're about restructuring, automation, or an overcorrection from pandemic-era overhiring. Or quite honestly, these layoffs are more often a strategic realignment of resources as our industry evolves.

But That's Only Half the Story—Because the Labor Market Is Still Tight

Here's what is confusing. While some companies are downsizing, the same company is often struggling to hire talent. The downsized role is gone forever as our industry evolves, and new talent and skills are needed. And those new skills are in short supply or concentrated in industries where we face challenges attracting talent.

For example, as we see the need to digitize the customer experience, a salesperson who has built success primarily on long-term relationships is feeling the pressure to evolve their skills. Clients have less time to spend with "salespeople" and expect to engage with vendors online. The long-term sales professional needs to adapt, or they become a layoff statistic.

Or, an Operations Executive who has been at the top of their game for decades is being asked to use more data for decision-making. "Just knowing in the gut" how an operation is performing is not enough. To grow and/or deploy capital, operation teams are being asked for more justification in how they operate. Data-based decision-making at all levels of an organization is the new normal.

So yes—there are layoffs. And yes—there are still critical jobs that can't be filled. This is not a "one-lane" market. It's two (or more) moving side by side.

How Can That Be?

Here's the metaphor I use with clients: Picture two lanes on a highway.

- One lane has folks merging off—after layoffs, restructurings, or company shifts.
- The other lane is crawling—because companies can't find the right people for specific, high-stakes roles.

That's what makes 2025 so tricky. It's not just a surplus of talent, and it's not just a talent drought. It's a mismatch—in timing, geography, skills, and expectations. And if you don't know how to read the map, you'll get lost fast.

What This Means If You're Hiring

Let's be honest: hiring right now is hard. I talk to hiring managers all the time who are frustrated and burned out. You post a job and get 150 applicants… and maybe 2-3 are worth a second look. You lose great candidates halfway through the process because someone moved faster. Or worse—you hire in a hurry and regret it three months later.

Here's what I tell my clients at Taylor Transportation Search Group:

- **Evolved thinking required.** The old job descriptions are out of date. As we bring in new skills and talent, have you looked outside the industry or outside your organization as to what you can expect? If you narrowly focus on the outdated job description, you are continuing to use old tools for new ways of doing things. Look beyond your organization for fresh thinking!
- **Speed kills (in a good way).** Is your organization ready to get this done? If your internal process takes three weeks to schedule a second interview, you're going to lose top-tier talent. Period. Fast decisions win.
- **Clarity sells.** What's your hiring brand? Why should someone come to your organization in uncertain times? Be clear about what the role really offers—development, impact, growth—not just salary. Candidates want more than a job. They want a career.
- **Don't DIY every search.** Evolving your workforce is not easy. Breaking our own biases about what we know and getting our team on board takes commitment. You need an external partner who knows your industry, your roles, and what you're up against as a change catalyst. Otherwise, too often we fall back into what we know versus pursuing what we need.

What This Means If You're Job Searching

If you were affected by layoffs this year—first, know this: you're not alone. Here's how to take control back:

- **Lead with your value, not your history.** Focus on results. "I saved $200k by using data to revise a process" is more compelling than your title. Show how you think and what you deliver.

- **Don't jump just for a paycheck.** Short-term security often turns into long-term regret. If you have the luxury, take the time to find the right fit, the right team, and the right kind of challenge.
- **Get visible, stay vocal.** Update your LinkedIn profile. Engage in conversations. Reach out to your network. You don't have to broadcast a layoff, but you do have to stay in motion.
- **Stay open.** Maybe this is the moment to try a new vertical. Maybe it's time to move laterally, not up. Most leadership journeys aren't linear.

Final Thought: Strategy Wins in a Mixed Market

So—are we in a layoff economy? Yes. Are we also facing a talent shortage? Yes, again. It's not a contradiction. It's a reflection of the workforce and an industry in transition. Transportation isn't static. It never has been. The talent market reflects that. Some areas are contracting. Others are growing. Some professionals are free agents. Others are staying put until the right move comes along. What separates people and companies that thrive from those that stall? Strategy. Speed. And the ability to execute and pivot as circumstances change.

CHANGES WITHIN THE RSI QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

By Gary Alderson – AllTranstek, LLC

2025 has proven to be a challenging year for the RSI Quality Assurance Committee. Margaret Zero of GATX was Chair of the committee until the end of 2024, and we would like to thank her for her leadership during her term. When Margaret's term expired, Michael Ruby also had to step away from his role as Vice-Chair, and there was no plan in place to backfill those leadership positions. While Michael's time with the committee was brief, we wish to thank him for his input to the newsletter and his volunteer work with the group. While this transition was happening, the Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) for the RSI Newsletter, AAR M-1003, and Education kept moving forward with their respective actions. Jeffrey Ostander with RSI (Smithbucklin) was tasked with overseeing the committee and TAGs, and then he left mid-year.

Since that time, Carrie Wall joined RSI to pick up where Jeffrey left off, and she is working diligently with the TAG members to move the QAC forward. Carrie held a meeting on October 3, 2025 with invitations to the current list of members and volunteers. Bob Wolbert retired at the end of October, and Sanjay Varma is taking his place at Progress Rail. We wish Bob the best and thank him for his continued commitment to RSI, and his volunteer work is greatly appreciated. Sanjay Varma is taking over in Bob's place and has agreed to serve as Chair for the RSI QAC. Gary Alderson has agreed to serve as Vice-Chair to help Sanjay transition and get the committee back to regular meetings and communicating with RSI members.

With Carrie's help, we hope to get organized for the upcoming AAR Quality Auditor's Confernce to be held in St. Petersburg, FL in Feburary. RSI members volunteer to provide presentations and workshops at the conference, and one of our first priorties is to let Don Guillen know who will be presenting at the conference. Please reach out to Carrie Wall, Sanjay Varma, and Gary Alderson if you have any questions or would like to volunteer with us.

2026 AAR M-1003 QUALITY ASSURANCE TRAINING SCHEDULE

COURSE	DATE	LOCATION
BASIC AUDITOR TRAINING CLASS	MARCH 24-26	SAN DIEGO, CA
	APRIL 14-16	MEXICO CITY, MX (SPANISH)
	JUNE 2-4	KANSAS CITY, KS
	JULY 21-23	CALGARY, CA
	SEPTEMBER 15-17	VIRGINIA BEACH, VA
	OCTOBER 27-29	NASHVILLE, TN
ADVANCED AUDITOR TRAINING CLASS	MARCH 10-12	MIRA LOMA, CA
	MAY 19-21	KANSAS CITY, MO
	SEPTEMBER 29 – OCTOBER 1	MARMADUKE, AR
	OCTOBER 13-15	MONCLOVA, MX (SPANISH)

USEFUL LINKS

Railway Supply Institute

RSI QAC & Previous Newsletters

RSI Tank Car Resource Center

Registry of M-1003 Certified Companies

M-1003 Frequently Asked Questions

American Society for Quality - Training

RSI 100

AAR M-1003 Certification on-line Application

AAR M1003, Section J Specification for Quality Assurance

AAR Training Schedule

AAR Circulars

MSRP Publication Current Revision Status

AAR Online Material Nonconformance Reporting System (Chapter 7)

AAR FAQ Page includes QAPE

THE FOLLOWING RSI QAC TEAM MEMBERS WORKED ON THIS NEWSLETTER:

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Donna Jacobi – Amsted Rail

Alfredo Ricardo – AllTranstek

Bob Wolbert – Progress Rail

Ben Masters – Progress Rail

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