

"If it wasn't for the transport and logistics training provided at our school, I don't think any of us would have considered a career in this industry."

— Jade Fuss, 17.

OUT of the mouths of relative babes. Jade Fuss an uuter Melbourne secondary school student, put it in a nutshell at last week's one-day Supply Chain Excellence Summit and Careers Forum.

While political satirist Bryan Dawe at the summit lunch quoted philosopher Bertrand Russell as saying, "if it can be put in a nutshell it should probably stay there", Russell knew nothing of transport, distribution and logistics recruitment.

Despite transport, distribution and logistics industry struggling to get workers, it is not as simple as that.

Schools need visiting industry officers to tell students that exciting and worthwhile jobs are waiting for them upon graduation.

Equally, with the Australian economy working at near capacity, so, too, is the industry – flat out.

Sparing crucial executives and taking out time to brief them is difficult when the money is running. And then there are those catch-all health and safety fears.

But, in truth, these are just excuses. If times were bad, it would be all hands to the pumps to save the company – those that were left.

Now that times are almost too good, competition for recruits is fierce, with a new cohort up for grabs in a market where they are scarce and hold the whip hand.

No, this is an attitude problem. The proof? Border Express, the 2005 Australian Trucking excellence in training award and 2006 New South Wales Road Transport Association master carrier of the year winner.

A mid-tier transport operation, the Wodonga firm has grown from family trucking concern 25 years ago of two staff, seven leased

Lesson is recruiting

Time, imagination and desire are of the essence, discovers ROB MCKAY

trailers and two customers to a BRW Top 500 company with 750 staff and 250 regular contractors.

But as national human resources manager Mark Byatt said, when he arrived at the company several years ago, there was no human resources department. Now, training and personal development are "business critical areas", which can give

company that does transport," a Border Express founding family member director and general manager Geoff Luff said recently.

At least the technology is modern and the environment dynamic, but how to get this accepted by a savvy and confident potential workforce that knows what it wants and increasingly how to get it?

Border Express has its

doors to students seeking work experience. With a battle for the right recruits to be won, this is no time for colleges and universities to be unable to find one position available, as an educational institution said at the event.

Getting to students in

school is part of the struggle, getting them out into the work place while they are still studying is equally so.

When a 17-year-old female student can say that while she had been looking towards a receptionist position: "I was aiming too low – I could push

myself higher" and that some of her friends, who have started the same way, were now looking at sales and marketing and even university, it could be that young hearts and minds are being captured this way.

There is no time to waste.

'We're now an IT company that does transport' — BORDER EXPRESS'S GEOFF LUFF

a company a competitive advantage.

Mr Byatt pointed out that high employee turnover equals high cost, when even junior staff can cost a firm \$10,000-\$15,000 when they leave, and senior managers up to two and a half times their salary.

And with 50% of workers nationwide saying they viewed their present job as short term, or two years, these are serious figures.

"Sexy", rich in connotations of the "permissive society", was bandied about at the Melbourne event.

This may or may not have had a lot to do with the age and gender of even these most forward-looking executives, but the point about how to make the industry attractive to senior school students was lost on no-one.

Border Express has done an admirable amount of research on its workforce, both present and future, and its findings were sobering – not least that nearly half were about 50 years old.

So, let's start with the job itself.

"We used to be a transport company . . . we're now an IT

lens on "Generation Y", the 12-26 age group, and is formulating a multi-strategy approach for "Generation Z", the under 12s, which has been trialled in schools on both sides of the Murray River.

Initial results have been promising, with 67% approval immediately after a measurable, interactive, two-way discussion.

That if you bring the industry face-to-face with students, they will respond positively, is being borne out by Toll Holdings's Toll Virtual Youth Enterprise Project.

Centred on a school-based practice firm with students using actual business data in company officer roles, this collaborative effort between Toll, TDT Victoria and the National Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council (TDT Australia) is proving invaluable if the students from the Grange P-12 College and Werribee and Galvin Park secondary colleges are anything to go by.

Still, while the colleges are supportive, the exercise needs \$75,000 for the next three years. It will be instructive to see which firms stump up that cash.

Just as instructive will be the companies that open their