

LICENSEE LEADERS



AUG 2023

DAVENE

TAYLOR

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SYED

MAHMOOD

Community

The New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission’s (TLC) Licensee Leaders is a media program that highlights the stories and voices of TLC’s community of drivers and other licensees, amplifying leadership in accessibility, customer service, and safe driving.



Licensee Leaders’ monthly program engages the TLC community through long and short-form features. The series also recognizes citywide and national awareness months while celebrating the viewpoints of our licensees as they relate to culture and heritage, industry, and safety.

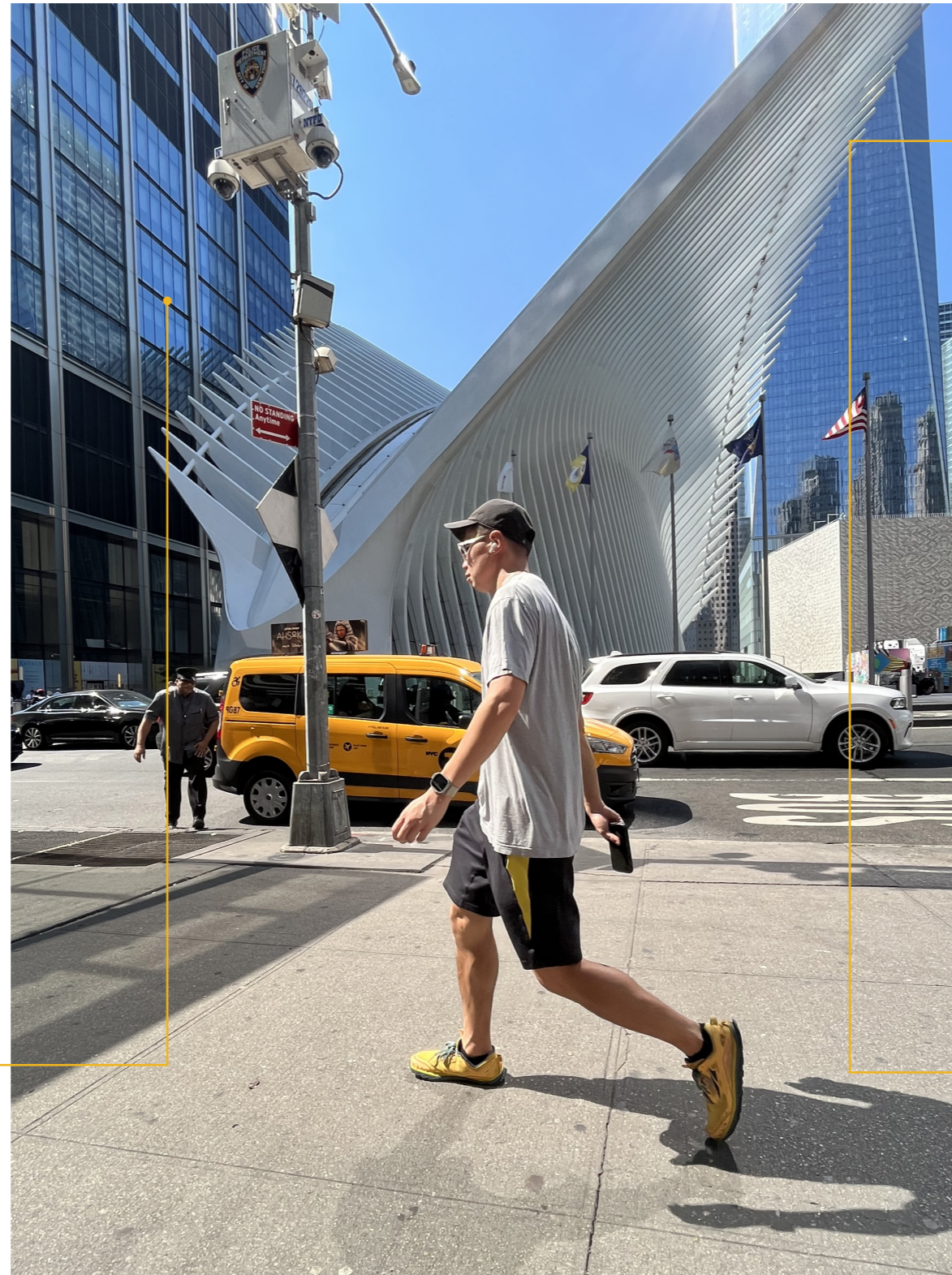
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TLC's Licensee Leaders programming for August 2023 includes enriching perspectives on safe driving and the unique responsibility that New York City holds across the world in being at the forefront of innovation and progress.

From TLC-licensed drivers, bases, fleets, and medallion agents to its approved driver education providers and the riding public at large it serves, the taxi and for-hire vehicle community in NYC is one of the most culturally diverse in the country and world.



In this issue we speak with for-hire vehicle (FHV) driver Davene Taylor and manager Syed Mahmood, TLC licensees who are driven by purpose through family, community, and industry.

With Taylor, we learn of her motivation and journey as a driver after growing up on a farm in Jamaica. Mahmood, who grew up between Bangladesh and India and later spent 15 years in Finland, shares his thoughts on environmental sustainability and NYC as a global influencer.

INTRODUCTION



Driver Spotlight

Davene Taylor

TLC's External Affairs met with FHV driver Davene Taylor in Harlem to talk heritage, creating opportunity, and moving toward what makes you happy.

TLC: As a "Licensee Leader" for August 2023, what does recognizing driver leadership in safety, accessibility, and customer service mean to you?

Davene Taylor: It definitely means a whole lot. Setting a good example is something that a person should work

towards because being a leader and being exceptional in whatever you do really counts. It means a lot.

TLC: Why do you think setting an example is important to encourage safe driving across the industry?

DT: My overall thing is that in life, if you're doing something, you should do the best that you can do. Because there is no room for mistakes and there is no possibility to go back to get it done. So do it right the first time.

TLC: If not in New York City, where did you grow up?

DT: I was born in Jamaica in a parish called Westmoreland. It is rural Jamaica. And I grew up basically on a farm, where I lived with my grandfather, my sisters, and my mother, who would leave for work in the city. I think it molded me into who I am today.

TLC: Was there anything from your upbringing that helped shape who you are today?

DT: My mother wasn't there most of the time and it wasn't because she didn't want to be, but because she had to work to provide for me and my older sister. And I think that gave me a sense of independence. In a sense, I grew up a little bit faster because I depended more on myself than on my mother or any other adult.

Already, my son is like, "Mommy, you are the strongest person I have ever seen." And I feel that's because I keep moving towards whatever it is that I want. Whatever goal I set, no matter how challenging it gets, I keep working towards it.

My sister, growing up, was the introvert. And I was the extrovert. So, she was the more laid-back person. She had her own challenges, but she had channeled them earlier into education. But, for me, that wasn't the case.

TLC: What do you feel you were



Taylor in Manhattan's Harlem neighborhood

more focused on at that time?

DT: I was always out with friends, doing hair. I love to do hair and I still do hair today. That is how I learned, because I was always doing everybody else's hair. Also, I was cooking from an earlier age. Things like that. I feel I was more focused on being with friends and building a community.

Everything you choose to do prepares you for the future. Because everything I was doing back then, even if I wasn't more focused on school, I gained the skills that I am using today.

TLC: Wonderful. What initially brought you to NYC?

DT: So, I moved here first in 2017. I first got a visa to come here in 2015, a few months after my son was born. We traveled here twice, just to visit, but I decided to move here in 2017 because I wanted to provide a better life for him. I felt there was more opportunity.

I actually got married, and then I eventually moved here. I was living in New Jersey, and it was okay there, but I thought I needed to try this city life. And so, I've been living in New York City since 2021. During the pandemic.

TLC: What was it like moving to the City at that time?

DT: It was still the beginning of the pandemic. It was challenging because I had to get used to being inside. And it's a bigger city. Everything is different from being in New Jersey. At one point, I thought I was literally going to go crazy because I am a country girl. And I'm not used to being inside all day. So, it was a big adjustment, and it was hard working through it, but I did.

“Just take it slow, don't take anything personal, and you'll be fine.”



Taylor sought a move to the U.S. to create opportunity for her family

TLC: What first inspired you to start driving professionally?

DT: I decided I had to figure out something that I could do where I could depend on myself and that would work with my son's schedule. I must be able to support him, and myself, and achieve my goals. I also wanted to go to college to earn my degree. So, I learned about Uber. And went to get my TLC driver's license.

TLC: Did you know any taxi or FHV drivers before you started driving?

DT: The person who encouraged me to move to New York is a taxi driver. He told me about the industry and about Uber.

He said, “Listen. If you want to do something that's flexible with your son's schedule, it's best for you to do Uber.” So that's when I did the research, saved up the money, and went ahead and got the license. He was the one who told me about it. He's been here for 20-something years and has been driving for a long time. He told me, “If you decide to, you can get up and go make the money to pay your rent in a couple of days. You decide when.”

TLC: How important was the idea of being self-employed to you?

DT: It meant everything to me. I did not want to go to work for anybody. I've always been an entrepreneur. Even back home. I have owned three

restaurants. So, yes, it is something that I like to do. So, I learned about Uber, and felt that it was the perfect thing for me. I love to interact with people and to travel. And I saw driving as including these two things I love to do, and felt it was the perfect thing for me.

TLC: What did you think of the process of becoming licensed, including attending driver education classes?

DT: It was challenging. But like in life, everything new will be challenging, if you see it that way. But you must look at the positive parts of your life, such as why you are doing something. I just focus on reaching the end and how I needed to move forward.



FHV driver Taylor talks heritage, entrepreneurship, and safe driving practices

TLC: What was it like for you at the beginning? Did certain driving skills come more naturally than others?

DT: I love driving and have always been driving. It came naturally. I love driving and traveling. I have drove from New York to Louisiana. That's a 23-hour drive. I have also driven to Boston, two years ago, with my son and my sister. Next, I want to drive to Florida, or somewhere else. I love road trips.

I have always been a driver. I was the only person in my family who was driving back home. So, whenever family members would come back from overseas, or whenever somebody wanted to go somewhere, I was



A driving-enthusiast, Taylor enjoys road trips in her free time

the person that they would call.

TLC: Do you think that has also played a role in you choosing this profession?

DT: I like providing services for people. I like making people happy. I enjoy being a part of their appreciation and gratitude. Somebody getting something done that they had wanted to. Just the expression on their faces... that makes me happy.

TLC: In what ways does driving in NYC differ from driving elsewhere?

DT: It's very different. If you can drive in Jamaica, you can definitely drive in New York. We have small roads. We don't have big highways. But drivers in New York are persistent, and while on the road, they might not let you go through. So, you have to master patience.

Whereas Jersey is a nice, slow feel, in New York you have to be mindful of horn-honking at the change of the light, other drivers cutting you off, and some of the craziest things. You see it in New York. If you don't have patience, you cannot drive professionally here.

TLC: What quality have you found essential as a safe driver in NYC?

DT: Don't be in a rush.

If you are rushing to get somewhere, you might make a decision that is not the right decision. And you may not end up at your destination. So, it is not worth it. Just take it slow, don't take anything personal, and you'll be fine. Be patient and it will be okay.

TLC: What is something that is important to work on as a driver, for everyone?

DT: I have been trying to teach my sister to drive. She doesn't want to. She is nervous. One time I tried to have her drive from Jersey to New York. And my son was like, "Mom, do not let Auntie drive." [Laughs.] Because she's just too nervous, and that's the thing. I'm like, you can't be nervous on the road.

If she decides she wants to drive, she will get there. But otherwise, if she wants to get somewhere, she will call her sister and her sister will take her wherever she wants to go. [Laughs.] If her bike does not take her there. Because she rides everywhere. She also rides through a sponsorship, raising money for kids who cannot pay their tuition. I wish I could cycle but I can't!

TLC: Have there been any passengers who have had a lasting impression on you?

DT: Yes, I have passengers who stick out, that I will always remember. I had this passenger, a lady, who I picked up in Queens. I forgot her name, but I will always remember her. It was

halfway into the ride that I started to talk to her. She was elderly, going through a divorce, going through a lot. And, I was as well at the time, but she didn't know that. So, I was speaking with her and being encouraging. And she was like, "You don't know what you've done [for me]." And when I got to the destination, she was still sitting in the car for a long time, talking. She did not leave. And it was so nice to just sit there and talk with her. She was like, "Can I give you a hug?" And she gave me a hug.

And there was this other lady I met downtown. She wanted to talk about my son and said, "You sound like a great mother. And your son sounds like he is super smart." And she said she wanted to send me money through the app, as a tip, to open an account for my son. And she did. She gave me a good tip.

I've had a passenger that was going through aches and pains. For me, I am borderline diabetic. I had gestational diabetes when I was pregnant with my son, so I am borderline. And my son is too. So, when asked, I tried to just give her some advice, such as developing healthy eating habits. And she was excited to learn about that.

People will forget the things you do for them, but will never, ever forget the way you made them feel. So, you should always try to make the experience memorable.

TLC: It sounds like you have had some very happy customers.

DT: It's exciting. It feels like I am working, but like I am helping others, in more than one way.

Life is not all about money. You need money to pay bills. But doing something doesn't mean that you should do it to get rewarded with money alone. That should not be the outlook.

TLC: Has there been anything unexpected you have learned from a passenger?

DT: I have learned a whole lot. A passenger will come and start a conversation, and might go ahead and ask me, "What else do you do?" And I will tell them about how I am going to school, and I am also planning to go into the healthcare field as well. They will ask me about my interests and point me in a direction that perhaps I did not know about. So, yes, I have learned a lot from them.

For example, there was this one nurse practitioner I had picked up as a passenger. He wanted to encourage me. He said, "You sound smart. Are you going towards your dreams?" He encouraged me to get my High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma and get into college. And he was Jamaican too. He said, "You can rise. Whatever it is, just make that step." He continued, "And whatever help you need, once you make that step, just reach out to me and I will do whatever I can."

TLC: Why, in your opinion, is having great customer service skills important as a NYC taxi or FHV driver?

DT: Customer service is everything. If you have an open space, and you let someone into that space, you should give them the best experience. Communication is always key. While communicating, you will also figure out if the person would like to talk. The conversation will take its own direction from there. It's about having a good personality and good communication skills.

Communication is everything. You can share one word with somebody, and it can change their entire day. For the better. For me, it's always good to say, "Good morning," or "How was your day?" It can mean a whole lot to that person.

TLC: In what way do you find community in NYC?

DT: When you surround yourself with the right people, in the right neighborhood, it is great. It's the American life I'm looking for – the American dream.

TLC: Are there any other goals you have that you would like to share?

DT: I am also studying to be a nurse. I graduated from my HSE classes this summer. And it has been a journey. It's a journey I am on right now.



Taylor, pictured with her son, speaks on the importance of seatbelt use

I have an interview story with them coming out as well, as they are focused on empowering women to complete their HSE diploma. The school is called Grace Outreach, an education center in the Bronx.

In three years, I should complete my associate's. From there, I'd like to attend Columbia University or Hunter College for a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Actually, one of the ladies whose hair I do keeps recommending me to go see the campus at Hunter.

It's always been a passion of mine. When I was in fifth grade, my mother got injured and I had to take care of her. That's when I learned it was

something I wanted to do. I also want to be a certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA). This stems from me wanting to protect people who are under anesthesia.

TLC: What does your schedule tend to look like?

DT: My son gets to school at 8:00 a.m., and I get to school at 9:00 a.m. I get off at 3:00 p.m. and he gets off at 4:00 p.m. Once I get home, and make sure his homework is done, I make him dinner. Then I have a sitter who accompanies him while I go to work at 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. She puts him to bed by 8:30 p.m. and I get home by midnight or 1:00 a.m.

TLC: During a workday, how often do you take a break? Why is it important to take time out from driving?

DT: Sometimes I only take one break. You need a break, to refresh. It's necessary. After every couple of hours, you do need at least a few minutes – just to breathe, just to not be that focused.

TLC: What neighborhoods are you most excited to conduct trips in?

DT: I love to go to Queens. And I love to get the rides that take a long time – like those hour-long rides. When I get one of those, I am so excited. Or an hour and a half, going upstate somewhere, it's so nice. I get that type of ride two or three times per week. Though I wish that was every ride I got! I like far rides.

For example, I had this family who was moving with their son from downtown. They had bought a house almost two hours away. So, I took them and their son up there, upstate. Going to Connecticut, or somewhere further, would be exciting. I would love that!

TLC: Do you tend to receive a lot of airport trip requests as well?

DT: I love airport rides. I used to wake up very early for the early morning airport rides. And then, still, for example on Saturdays, I'll start around 4:30 a.m. and that tends to be an air-



Taylor with her son in Central Harlem

port ride. And then I'll work for the rest of the day, and the airport rides will pick up again toward the end of the day.

TLC: Where are you usually when you receive a trip request to go to the airport?

DT: So, sometimes you will have a pre-arranged trip with a passenger who has scheduled the ride. I always check for those. That's how I get most of them. Otherwise, if I leave my house and drive down to 51st Street or somewhere down there, there's a possibility I'm going to end up at the airport. And then, if I want to go to Jersey to go get some gas, to cross the bridge, then I'll just go drive around 42nd Street. [Laughs.]

And more than likely, the trip is going to send me to Jersey. There are certain places, that based on where you are, you know where you're going to end up.

TLC: As someone who has demonstrated a commitment in safe driving, what does it mean to be driving safely, in your opinion?

DT: To drive safely, first, you have to be focused. Do not be distracted by your phone. Safety and feeling safe is very important. This means no cell phones. And you must always follow the rules of the road. One single mistake can cost someone's life. So, follow all the rules. There is no leeway. That is how I see it.

TLC: Since your work might also involve using a cell phone such as to accept a trip, do you keep your phone on "Do Not Disturb" while driving?

DT: I do not focus on anything other than driving when I am driving. And I am also planning to get a second phone which will be just for work purposes. Even after I help the passenger arrive to their destination, I am not interested in using the phone for personal use. I want to separate work and my personal life entirely.

Also, you cannot have the phone ringing and distracting you or taking your navigation setup off the screen. You have to always be prepared.

TLC: What reminders might you have for other taxi and FHV drivers about safe driving?

DT: I have been in a situation where I went to pick up a passenger and my navigation was telling me to make a turn down a one-way street. The passenger told me it was just a few days earlier that it became a one-way street. You might have that person who understands when the route changes. Though not every passenger might understand this to know that [the traffic change] is not your fault. You have to be mindful of that. Otherwise, be aware of the speed limit.

TLC: What about seatbelt use? Do you offer a reminder to passengers to wear their seatbelts before starting the trip?

DT: With the Highlander, a beeping sound won't go off until all of the seatbelts are on. It's deafening. [Laughs.] So, they have to put it on. And if there is still someone who still does not want to put it on, I might mention, "Would you mind putting your seatbelt on? It won't be a long trip and I would appreciate if you put it on." And from saying that, I've never had any negative feedback. Because it's for your safety.

Every day, when I go out to work, my goal is to be going home to my son. So, I am going to do everything in my power to protect myself and everybody.

TLC: What are your thoughts on the future of battery-powered electric vehicles (EVs)?

DT: We will eventually get there. Moreso, for me, it is about the environment. And when it comes to our health, I think it is a good idea. As [manufacturers] create more electric cars, it's going to get cheaper, and it's not going to be just Tesla. Hyundai and other manufacturers are starting to have electric cars.

TLC: What are you most excited about when it comes to your own future in the FHV industry?

DT: There are always opportunities in this industry, driving and as a business owner. I am excited to see how I can develop more, in this industry, as well as accomplishing my academic goals. The sky is the limit.

And if I want to own my own business, it would be another step forward.

TLC: Last question. Any essential advice for New Yorkers, drivers and passengers alike, looking to stay safe?

DT: Slow down. Just slow down. Because most of the time, it's about speeding. You might save your life or someone else's life.

TLC: Thank you so much.

DT: You're welcome.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.



PEOPLE WILL FORGET THE THINGS YOU DO FOR THEM, BUT WILL NEVER, EVER, FORGET THE WAY YOU MADE THEM FEEL.



To be a safe driver, Taylor suggests patience and minding the speed limit



Base Spotlight

Syed Mahmood

c/o Tap & Ride, Inc.

Syed Mahmood is the General Manager of the Queens-based TLC-licensed base Tap & Ride, Inc. Focused on driver engagement, building awareness around environmental sustainability, and the power of mentorship, TLC's External Affairs spoke with Mahmood at the base's office in Richmond Hill.

TLC: What is your title at Tap & Ride?

Syed Mahmood: I am the General Manager.

TLC: Are you from New York City?

SM: No, I moved here in 2016. I moved here from Finland.

TLC: What was it like growing up in Finland?

SM: I didn't grow up there. I actually spent my young adult life there – about 15 years.

TLC: Did your career bring you there?

SM: I was studying there. I completed my graduation there. Then I was doing my master's degree. Before that, I was working for multiple corporations and on some European Union-funded projects.

TLC: Were you working in a transportation-related industry in Finland?

SM: No, mostly in business development and artificial intelligence (AI).

TLC: Wonderful. What did you originally study at university?

SM: Computer Science. Through and through.

TLC: It's interesting how people find their way to this industry. There is no shortage of talent - from computer science to mechanical engineering.

SM: Yes. When I moved here, I think my first job was in the for-hire vehicle industry. I was an instructor. And then after a year and a half, I moved to Niagara Falls.

There, I worked for different companies, including one of the largest contractors of the federal government, Public Consulting Group, which is based in Albany, NY. I worked for them for about a year and a half before working for another corporation with artificial intelligence.

TLC: Where did this all start for you?

SM: I was born in Bangladesh. And then I was raised between there and India. And then, it's from there I went to Finland for my bachelor's [degree], and also for my master's [degree]. But I have only completed half of it so far, as I stopped to move to New York City. It is ongoing. I'm now planning to continue with it.

TLC: Do you see yourself continuing with your studies thereafter?

SM: Yes, I will do my Ph.D. And actually, I had this conversation with Mr. Siddiqy [Asad Siddiqy, an owner of Tap & Ride]. I told him I wanted to pursue my master's and Ph.D and I received a great signal from him to do that.

TLC: What do you think your research will involve?

SM: I would say, right now, I'm very interested in quantum mechanics and quantum computing. I can see that that's the future now. I can see quantum computing will take over everything.

TLC: And what was it that first brought you to the taxi and for-hire vehicle industries in NYC?

SM: Mr. Siddiqy was looking for someone that could speak multiple languages. And I called him, and he asked me to come over, sit down, and see what I could bring to the table. And he liked me, I liked him, and we started working together. That was the beginning.

“We have almost 170,000 drivers here in New York City. And every act they do matters. It matters to the other residents.”

I would say I am a human-centric person. I love people, working with people, culture, languages. So, I try to understand different things, different cycles. I believe in the butterfly effect. Imagine how we have almost 170,000, about 164,000, drivers here in New York City. And every act they do - it matters. It matters to the other residents of New York City.

People may question what I am doing here because I have a very strong IT [information technology] background. I think, “Why not?” We are talking about an industry, the future of the industry, and the sustainability of the industry. Why would drivers alone be a part of that? I am actually a driver, too. I'm a yellow cab driver. I've driven pretty much everything - yellow cab, green cab, Uber, Lyft. And there used to be Juno and Gett. Just to get experience and to understand how people feel.

TLC: How long were you working as a professional driver?

SM: I drove for a few months. I started driving in March 2017. I drove for six months straight just to get knowledge and experience. You have to be in that environment to understand.

TLC: How do you feel your way of looking at things affects the way you approach this industry?

SM: I wrote an article a few months ago.



Mahmood in the Richmond Hill neighborhood of Queens

I think it was back in December 2022. It was discussing a position on Homeland Security about artificial intelligence and the future of humanity. And so, I like to think about the industry in this way.

I think we are the only species on Earth who can think about the future in an abstract way. Are we leaving a sustainable planet to our next generation?

I think our regulatory bodies should come up with ideas for our working families, for what they should do. I think they should address this issue. Not in the next six months to year, but the next 10-year period. First of all, my question is if there will be taxis in 10- or 20-years' time. Will we see hu-

man drivers or self-driving cars? And what will the next generation do?

If we have 164,000 drivers, then that is 164,000 families too. And that's their next generation. So, what are they going to do? TLC is doing enough. I teach a renewal course and I see all of these resources there, so I know TLC is certainly doing enough. But I think we always have room for improvement.

TLC: Do you think you are taking on an advocacy role of sorts?

SM: I don't know. Time will tell. I have a lot of ideas, but then I think to myself, “Am I really capable of doing those things?” I question myself all the time, for self-accountability. They are just ideas, residing in my head. I might like to point something out to someone about the future that might also involve them, but they might choose to just live in this moment first. And I would perfectly understand. “Living for today.” I get that. But as I get older, I do think about living for the next generation. And not just for my kids, but everyone's kids. Are we living in a sustainable planet? Enough water for them? Enough job opportunities?

If you don't speak English, it's very easy to join this industry in comparison to other places. For example, someone coming from Bangladesh or India, who might not have anything else to do.

I have never seen a city like New York City, where one license allows you to earn roughly \$200 every day.

New York City is that sort of city, so I love this city. I love the energy of this city and the opportunities of this city.

But then, when we consider technological advancement, are we leaving all those families behind? And for the ones that don't know how to speak English, how will they learn to use other technology or advancements?

TLC: Do you feel it is a part of your goals to help build some type of bridge, where technology and working families are concerned?

SM: I wish I could. A great educator once said, "Be ashamed to die before you score something for humanity?" I am still ashamed. I don't want to die. [Laughs.] I will try my best.

TLC: In your opinion, what does a more sustainable future look like here in NYC? Where do you see Tap & Ride's driver community in that future?

SM: I think that the City is already working on that, to reduce our carbon footprint.

We can see that happening before our eyes. I feel New York City is the capi-

tal of the world. When you do something here, it is replicated around the world. They look up to New York City around the world. So, I feel like the City is doing enough.

I want to integrate our driver community more into the system. Like, when there are public hearings, I want to see them participating. So, if we can do something to encourage them to participate in the changes of the rules and regulations, for those who are not aware, that could be good.

For example, let's say we are making them aware of the incentives associated with buying an electric vehicle. The next question may not be about the planet, as there are many people who do not think of nor have a concept of sustainability or eco-friendliness. They might not understand those concepts.

People inherently assume that those concepts are understood. We could also make people aware how whatever you do today will probably have some impact in 50 years if not sooner. I have seen this climate change in my lifetime - it's very scary.

I do think that in 50 years down the line, there will be no country named Bangladesh, most likely, because it will be underwater. I feel scared for that.



**AS I GET OLDER, I DO
THINK ABOUT LIVING
FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.
NOT JUST FOR MY
KIDS, BUT EVERYONE'S.**

**ARE WE LIVING IN A
SUSTAINABLE PLANET?**



TLC: What is another way you hope to see environmental sustainability awareness progress?

SM: I think, because [the driver community] consists of New Yorkers, that the government should take more initiative to reach the drivers and their families who are not aware of climate change, to educate them about it. So, I believe it means first reaching the individual, individual psychology, and then that becomes collective psychology. That can elevate and change things. As far as the industry, and TLC's approved driver education providers, we have only seven schools and can only reach a handful of people. But the City can probably reach everyone.



Mahmood previously worked as a driver to gain understanding of the taxi and FHV industries

TLC: Building awareness is a great cause to have.

SM: When we come to New York City, we bring our culture, our language, our own way of living. Some people who come here might not have a good track record back home. And that might be one of the reasons they move to New York City. And it might take time to change those things. But over time, you integrate all those families into society. You teach them that this is how we live, that we think about the future and the next generation. And so, we must have a structured information system.

TLC: What other type of driver outreach does Tap & Ride prioritize?

SM: We have a culture of that here. If not daily, then on a weekly basis, we try to contact our drivers and ask if they are having any issues that they want to bring up. And then we try to help them. We try to educate them.

TLC: What do your daily responsibilities include as the General Manager at Tap & Ride?

SM: Mostly administrative, so quite a bit of paperwork. Also, it includes maintaining liaisons with regulatory bodies as well as the drivers.

TLC: What are some of things you have learned about managing a base so far?

“Whatever you do today will probably have some impact in 50 years if not sooner.”

SM: I have learned that we have to be really careful with our paperwork, especially relating to TLC, bonds, charity bonds. I was not aware of those things before. So, I learned. And Mr. Siddiqy has more than 35 years of experience working in the industry.

He probably transferred around 10-20 percent to me, and even with that I am overwhelmed. I said, “How have you been doing this for 35 years?” [Laughs.]

TLC: It's a lot to keep track of!

SM: Yes, he is a legend.

TLC: Yes, it's important to feel that you can place trust in your organization's leadership.

SM: I have learned a lot from him. He asked me one question from just yesterday. He asked, “How can I teach you about insurance?” [Laughs.] So, he started to teach me a bit about TLC-related insurance, and I was like,

“Ok! Now I get that.” Because he used to own other corporations as well. So, he knows everything about insurance. And I don't have anybody else to ask these questions to, in a really in-depth way, about the industry. So, I will ask him! I think he likes to teach too.

TLC: Are you hoping to contribute in a similar way for your colleagues at Tap & Ride?

SM: Yes, I see myself doing something. I have set up a type of internal infrastructure system here for whoever comes after me [to manage Tap & Ride as general manager].

So, if I am not here for some reason, if I die or if I choose to go somewhere else [laughs], then whoever comes here will get the idea very quickly about what we do.

TLC: What type of value do you hope to contribute to the industry overall?

SM: I think a fully-grown idea can stick to people's minds. Overall, we have to work with the engineers, the system designers, and others too, but just as well with the individual, and help the person to understand the reason being an effort. For example, I want to bring up Vision Zero. I usually ask, in the class that I teach, “When there is a STOP sign, and there are two drivers who arrive at an intersection at the same time, who has the right-of-way?”

“I want to integrate our driver community more into the system.

Like, when there are public hearings, I want to see them participating.”

It’s a very simple question. A lot of them will answer that the person on their right will have the right-of-way. And so my next question is, “Do you know why?”

When you break it down, as simple as possible, then they will start to understand. This is a law. And there is a reason behind the law, and also why the person on the right has the right-of-way. I tell them how, after today, they will never argue with another driver again when considering who has the right-of-way. And the reason is because in the United States we drive on the right side of the road and have our steering wheel on the left side of the road. So, if one was to hit the other vehicle in a collision, the vehicle will be hit correctly. And there is less chance that the person will die.

There are two scenarios in a collision. And then, drivers really start to get the idea when hearing this. ‘Oh, that’s the reason - why the person on the right has the right-of-way.’ I plant it in their heads.

It’s one of those things. If you remember a simple idea, it will grow in your head. And I feel it is a little step toward Vision Zero. I feel it’s about educating.

TLC: Any parting words you would like to leave us with?

SM: Yes, for anyone who is reading this conversation: If you could just take a minute and think when you are behind the wheel. As we say, “Your choices matter.” So, be patient.

You are held responsible and especially when you live in New York City. People around the world are watching. It is like a giant speaker. Do something here, and it reflects around the world. You are a part of that. Be proud of that. We live in New York City.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.



Mahmood considers the value he can deliver for the driver community while prioritizing awareness and education

THANK YOU

