

Alan Court – “Being on the edge of success or failure can be daunting

Alan Court’s career has taken him from being on the fringe of transport operations to the national manager for NZ Post Group. One of the inaugural students for the UK Diploma of Logistics programme here in New Zealand, this is his story.

In 1995 I wanted to change my career from an engineering and technical-based field to logistics management. At the time I held a mechanical engineering role at New Zealand Post that included materials handling equipment design, setting specifications for the heavy transport fleet, and administering a range of procurement and supply functions. It was a role on the fringe of transport operations which sparked an interest to learn more.

I was part of the inaugural intake for the UK Diploma of Logistics, starting in 1995, completing all modules within two years, and graduating in 1998. I was honoured to receive the top student award, up against stiff competition from fellow students who had also moved onto bigger things within the transport and logistics sector.

The initial diploma required students to choose case studies from within their workplace, to apply the knowledge they had learnt and demonstrate practical outcomes. This proved to be the perfect opportunity for me to get more closely involved in the operational aspects of transport, and identify business improvement opportunities.

Move to a new team

This work was noticed, and Neil Henderson, an experienced general manager from DHL who



Alan Court, general manager, transport, for the NZ Post Group:
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had been appointed to lead the NZ Post distribution team at the time, convinced me to move from Wellington to Auckland and join his relatively new Auckland-based team. I was soon appointed to the role of national road operations manager, and given the opportunity to put theory into practice. I was provided with the mentoring and freedom to optimise the road transport operations of the business, and apply the new skills and knowledge I had gained through my diploma studies. My technical and engineering skill-set combined well with my new logistics training, where attention to detail, problem-solving, and zero tolerance for mistakes or errors play a big part in both.

A 24/7 operation

Today I hold the position of general manager, transport, for the NZ Post Group. I have responsibility for all road and air transport operations nationally, meeting the distribution needs of the group’s courier and mail products, plus managing a range of other time-critical products on behalf of third-party customers that have similar requirements and service standards.

The network operates 110 heavy and medium commercial vehicles that link all major towns and cities across New Zealand, six days a week. This network is supported by a fleet of six aircraft that join the North and South Islands to enable an overnight service standard to be achieved for the priority products of CourierPost and NZ Post.

The product mix carried through the network today results in a 24/7 operation running every day of the year. Success or failure is measured every 24 hours, with over 2.3 million mail customers, and more than 170,000 courier customers ready to pass judgement if their delivery expectation isn’t met. Being on the edge of success or failure can be daunting for some, but is exhilarating for me and everyone else in my team.

Rugby World Cup logistics

There have been a number of career highlights over the years. One of the standouts was managing the freight logistics for the 2011 Rugby World Cup on behalf of DHL. This work involved building a bespoke solution that would be in place over the eight-week duration of the tournament.

There were 20 international teams, moving between 12 match venues, 23 team-base cities, 49 hotels and 40 training grounds. Each freight movement carried the team baggage, their support equipment, and full training kit (including scrum machines!). Over the course of the tournament, there were over 350 freight movements that had to meet pre-set schedules with zero tolerance for any delay or failure.

This would have been easy if it was the only thing we had to focus on, but adding existing business requirements and the challenges of New Zealand’s, infrastructure and geography into the mix made this a massive undertaking. Our small team completed this task with zero failures. However, like many things in the world of logistics, when a job is done well, the effort and work required to achieve this become largely invisible. It can be a tough measure of success sometimes.

Into the future

I hold the view that network design and optimisation is a perpetual task that is never complete. Recently, we announced a new

Cont. on page 31

ADVERTISING INDEX

Agoge	15	Dexion	5	NACCO Materials Handling	23, OBC
Clark Equipment	16-17	Droppoint Australia	11	Power Forklifts	13
Conslab	21	Kardex VCA	20	TallShips Solutions	4
Crown Equipment	IFC, 1	Kempton Holdings (Southpark Corporation)	7	Viscount Plastics	25
Dematic	9				