

## Grant Buckingham – “It’s the people side of things that keeps you awake at night”



**Grant Buckingham, operations manager at DSV Air & Sea: “The more knowledgeable you are on a topic, the more confident you will come across”**

Keen to find a full-time job so that he didn't have to go back to school, Grant Buckingham applied for a wide range of jobs – and freight forwarding just happened to be the one that worked out. This is his story.

Education certainly wasn't a strength of mine during my school years. I enjoyed lunchtime and being part of sports teams, and when my parents said I didn't have to go back to school if I had a full-time job, that was all the motivation I needed.

With no clear career path, I fired off job applications in every direction, and also threw my hat in the ring for a freight forwarding/logistics role. Whilst New Zealand Customs turned me down for being too young, I was successful with my other applications, so it was decision time. A friend of a friend was working for a freight forwarder so that's the path I chose, and I haven't looked back. The company at the time was Union Transport which over my 20-plus years of continuous service has acquired and been

acquired by other companies through to our current organisation of DSV Air & Sea.

### The road to customs brokering

From starting as a customs runner (basically a courier), then moving into a role as a customer junior, I had to prove my worth to become a qualified customs broker. The next step was into a customer service role for a key account which was my first real exposure to a client-facing role.

During one acquisition I decided it was time for another challenge, so I put my hand up for a move through to the export air team. This came with great hopes of an overseas all-expenses-paid 'educational', but my timing was off by about 12 months as these had all but dried up. Exports did, however, offer the best of both worlds: a strong operational focus combined with the ability to build relationships with clients; both of these fitted right into my wheelhouse.

Every change I've made since then has been into more senior roles, leading to my current role of

operations manager. People leadership has been a skill acquired and polished over many years. I still maintain that it's the people side of things that keeps you awake at night, rather than the nuts and bolts of the operation.

### Further studies

Completing the IATA and FIATA diploma programmes by correspondence early in my career gave me the confidence I needed to tackle further studies. In 2010 I was fortunate enough to have a leadership team who were great believers in professional development, and that's when the journey with Tessa and Walter Glass from the Logistics Training Group began.

When I first started the Professional Diploma in Logistics and Transport, I was in an export air freight role, so while many of the modules, such as international business, came naturally, others were more of a challenge. As an added benefit I had fellow colleagues completing the diploma with me, and it certainly helped to have a little friendly competition for the assignments.

The block courses in Auckland and site visits were also a welcome relief. They provided not only a boost in learning, but a perfect opportunity to bounce ideas off fellow students, take in different perspectives from an array of industries, and expand our personal networks, many of which still exist today.

### Customer-facing skills

Whilst my entire career has been spent on the freight forwarding side of the fence, in operational teams I have always prided myself on my customer-facing skills, and I am a true believer that the more knowledgeable you are on a topic, the more confident you will come across, and this is where I believe the diploma has really assisted. Whilst the sourcing/procurement module didn't apply directly to my role, it certainly did to that of my clients, who we work with to develop solution-based strategies. To be able to sit with a client and truly understand their needs and pain points – to walk a mile in their shoes – and then to convert these into a solution is extremely satisfying.

The style of study also suited me. To be able to entrench yourself in a fictitious company and their data and then be set assignments based on scenarios that imitate actual business decisions felt like what I was doing in my day-to-day working life. Having immediate responses to each assignment was also very satisfying.

### Looking back to move forward

For the last few years, my career and life in general has been my education, and at times has been a very hard teacher. Adapting through acquisitions, taking on the management of additional teams, and handling the everyday challenges of the freight and logistics industry has allowed me to look back and be very proud of where I started from 21 years ago. Likewise, I know that every day will continue to pose new and exciting challenges that I am ready to take on. Looking forward, I can't see that a week will go by without referencing some part of the diploma to provide me with the platform from which to operate.

*The Professional Diploma in Logistics and Transport is offered in New Zealand by the Logistics Training Group; for further information, visit [www.ltg.co.nz](http://www.ltg.co.nz)*