

Rob Pakes – “There’s no better teacher”

Rob Pakes' career has been spent in freight transport, honing his management skills over more than two decades, but a major health scare and some terrible family news changed everything. This is his story.

My story may differ somewhat from my fellow alumni – different good, different bad, I'm not sure, but it's my story so far none the less.

I've spent the past 26 years in the freight transport industry within two businesses, namely Owens Group and Toll New Zealand. I entered the industry at the age of 22 with Owens Group and spent the next 12 years working my way from the bottom of the team to a regional manager position, overseeing three branches, their full-truckload business, and a director role for a pulp and paper transport management joint venture.

In 2000, with the support of Owens Group, I started the CILT UK Diploma in Logistics and Transport with Walter Glass through Massey University (now delivered in NZ by the Logistics Training Group), studying part-time, and would over the next 18 months complete the course and be awarded the CILT NZ top graduate award in 2002. Having also started a family and with Walter's encouragement ringing in my ears, I started to think about further supply chain study in the coming year.

Owens Group was purchased by Mainfreight in 2004 and this saw me change jobs and start a new venture with Toll New Zealand which I hoped at some stage might take me offshore. With a laptop, vehicle and clean slate I was tasked with growing Toll's freight forwarding footprint in the Bay of Plenty from its meagre 800 sq m site. Over the next three years I set about establishing the company's presence, rapidly growing its turnover, relocating its operations twice, and restructuring two business units into one entity on one site.

My commercial relationships were still strong and many of them followed me to the new business. I'm thankful to this day that most of these relationships remain.

Personal challenges

The next three years also brought some significant personal chal-



Rob Pakes with one of his family: “The supply chain/logistics skills I've gained in the past 20-plus years, in conjunction with those learnt through the diploma, will stand me in good stead for whatever the future may hold”

lenges that would reshape the direction of my career for the foreseeable future. This included three heart attacks thanks to a hereditary condition, and the bombshell of our daughter being diagnosed with Rett Syndrome, an incurable genetic disease that would rob our girl of her ability to walk and talk.

Having been about to commence further logistics studies, I parked those ambitions, took a breath and tried to simply focus on how I would manage work, family and my own personal health challenges.

Over the next four years I would remain at Toll NZ in regional management and business development roles whilst simultaneously taking on a new personal challenge of creating a business plan and developing a charitable trust, namely Rett New Zealand, in conjunction with Sir Roderick Deane and Mark Campbell.

The trust quickly grew with support from Sir Roderick, while on the logistics front my focus

remained on building Toll's profile in the Bay of Plenty.

I continued to run the trust until 2010/11 when the arrival of our second and third children would see me resign as the trust's chairman, but remain involved as an ambassador, satisfied that I had achieved the business plan goals I'd set out and having raised close to \$500,000 in the process.

New business venture

I remained at Toll for the next six to eight years, holding a variety of roles that included business development across the Waikato/BoP region, branch management, the development of a smaller satellite depot, and a significant 3PL warehousing operation for an Australian-based customer. This included port movements, devanning and pack operations, plus warehousing, pick to SKU and nationwide distribution. Toll's facility had now grown from 800 sq m to around 11,000 sq m. In April last year I made a major change in direction and embarked

on my own business venture. Called Mauao Contractors, we contract to Oji Fibre Solutions, running a cardboard recycling facility. I have a newfound appreciation for the recycling industry, and the supply chain/logistics skills I've gained in the past 20-plus years, in conjunction with those learnt through the diploma with Walter, will stand me in good stead for whatever the future may hold.

The logistics industry, and in particular the freight industry, within New Zealand is an ever-changing, challenging and sometimes unforgiving environment, but in my view, there is no better teacher for whatever lies ahead.

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