

Simon Olsen – “Success is no accident”

Like so many young people fresh out of school, Simon Olsen had no firm ideas about his future career – so he joined one of New Zealand’s most progressive FMCG companies and has never looked back. This is his story.

When I left school I had no idea what I wanted to do. University? Trade? Travel? I was young, keen and had no direction. So I decided to start applying for jobs until I’d worked out what I wanted to do with my life.

In 2002, I applied for a job at Foodstuffs South Island (FSSI) and was successful in gaining an entry-level role working at the chilled and frozen distribution centre (DC) in Hornby, Christchurch, assembling orders and working with a good bunch of people. Foodstuffs has an awesome culture that encourages internal promotion within the business, and I could see there was a potential career for me at this innovative and successful company. The FSSI Hornby site continued to grow and in my first three years there I learnt every role in the DC: picking, forklift operation, inwards goods, dispatching, stock control, warehouse planning and control room, before moving into a supervisory role. After five years I was promoted into a senior role: day shift manager of the temperature-controlled DC. When I started at the Hornby DC it was dispatching around 50,000 cartons per week to our retail members, compared to about 750,000 per week now, with numbers still increasing. It supplies the PAK’nSAVE, New World and Four Square supermarkets, as well as Raeward Fresh, Henry’s BWS, On the Spot convenience stores and Trents Wholesale.

A pretty big challenge

It was during my time as day shift manager that I was introduced to the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) Professional Diploma in Logistics and Transport (Level 5 on the Qualifications and Credit Framework). FSSI has always encouraged staff to con-



Simon Olsen, the Hornby DC inventory manager for Foodstuffs South Island: “The diploma modules I’d worked through were based on the merging of warehouses, and here I was doing the real thing!”

tinue studying where possible, and after a sit-down with John Mullins, FSSI’s general manager of supply chain, we discussed the diploma, which he had completed himself some years prior, through Walter and Tessa Glass’s Logistics Training Group.

Once I enrolled, there were some full day sessions with Walter that outlined the course and took us through the standard of work that was expected. The course consisted of four modules and a total of 64 assignments. Trying to manage this study workload on top of a full-time job, a young family at home, and the disruption caused by the Canterbury earthquakes was a pretty big challenge.

However, I am lucky to have a supportive wife who didn’t mind me going into work early and then staying late to finish my assignments. In addition, FSSI had two other managers completing the diploma at the same time, so it was easy to bounce ideas off each other when we found ourselves scratching our heads over an assignment.

Doing the real thing

I finished my diploma in 2015 and around the same time was promoted to day shift manager

at the new 45,000 sq m ambient DC on the existing Hornby site. This was a demanding role as we were managing the difficult task of merging two DCs into one very large one, and also transitioning more than 200 staff from one side of town to the other.

It also involved strong planning and an understanding in change management, and the diploma couldn’t have prepared me better for the overall task as the modules I’d worked through were based on the merging of warehouses, and here I was doing the real thing!

Six months into the merger I was promoted again into the newly-created inventory manager role, which involves both the temperature-controlled and ambient DCs on the Hornby site, along with the management of the inventory and warehouse planning teams. The diploma gave me with the skills necessary to be successful in this position.

Increased productivity

The inventory manager has a significant influence on the performance of the DCs and is directly involved with the continual improvement of DC operations. By putting measurements in place to recognise areas of improvement, the team have

been able to help increase forklift productivity, increase pick rates, reduce warehouse damages and improve inventory accuracy.

Here, too, the diploma gave me the skills needed to thrive in this role. Once you complete its four modules, you finish with a business case within your workplace. I reviewed our DC’s damage process and with this initiative we successfully reduced our damages by over 75%.

In 2015 I was nominated for and won the CILT NZ Young Professional of the Year Award. After winning that, I was nominated for the CILT International Young Professional award, and in May of this year I travelled to Montreal for the awards ceremony and finished runner-up with commendation. This overseas travel was a great experience, as I also took the opportunity to visit a few major DCs in Montreal, Grand Rapids and Chicago.

A commitment to career development

There’s no doubt in my mind that without the diploma I would not have achieved these accolades, nor received my recent promotions within FSSI. Walter and Tessa at the Logistics Training Group do an amazing job, providing the support structure required to complete the diploma.

I have found it takes a lot of hard work to juggle study with a full-time job and a young family, but is definitely worthwhile in the long run, and I wouldn’t be where I am today without making this commitment to my career development.

I want to conclude with a quote from Pele: “Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and, most of all, love of what you are doing.”

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

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AgriQuip	23	Crown Equipment	IFC, 1	TallShips Solutions	17
Battery Life NZ	21	Kardex VCA	13	Waiariki Bay of Plenty Polytechnic	OBC
Conslab	9	Loadsense	25	XPO	7