

# It's not only about wearing shorts and driving!

By Sangeeta Anand



*Ports of Auckland's Matt Kidman, Tristan Anderson and Rob MacDonald – developing a programme of circulating young staff through various positions in their first two years or so is a good way to develop skills and retain staff*

Innovation involves people, their aspirations and persistence. The economies that are moving ahead at lightning pace are those that are nurturing vibrant young talent and innovative systems. In a world driven by knowledge-based innovations, is the New Zealand logistics and transport industry investing in younger talent?

The feedback is encouraging, if the research for this story is any indication. It appears that the supply chain industry is attracting top talent in New Zealand, and the logistics and transport professionals enjoy being part of this industry – though it wasn't a profession of choice for a few of them. Some joined by accident, some out of a curiosity to explore, some to develop a new skill-set, while others for the money that the industry offers.

There are a few who joined it for the non-tangible benefits such as contributing to the New Zealand economy, job variety, a feeling of accomplishment, working in a culturally diverse environment, having challenging work, working for a reputable organisation and effective management.

The clear underlying theme that's emerged from research for this story is that the professionals belonging to the Under 35-year-old (U35) Group enjoy the challenges that are unique to their profession and believe they are in the right industry. They would like to remain in the industry if they can find the right career fit in terms of skills, money, job satisfaction, ongoing training, advancement opportunities and an overall appeal factor. After all, continuous innovation will drive growth and lead sustainable development for our future.

## Whiff of freshness

To promote continuous innovation, the U35 Group has been set up to bring a whiff of freshness into the industry. The group is keen to attract young and creative minds into the industry to

imbibe modernisation.

Says Brian Stocking, executive director of CILT NZ, "our vision is turning into reality with the enormous opportunities that we have with our new U35 Group. The group is developing key initiatives, linked with the great deal of industry experience that we have. With our partnerships, we can face the many ongoing challenges in the industry today."

The size of the New Zealand and Australian logistics and transport industry is estimated to be \$66 billion. Can the New Zealand logistics and transport industry build on this success? Possibly – if companies deliver their goods at web speed to meet increased demands of globalisation and technology. With high-speed exchange of information, more companies will start up and this will drop prices. Profit margins are therefore expected to fall, and companies will have to start working smarter and cheaper.

## New technology

But the next-generation technology will shape the industry in a completely different way. Radio frequency identification (RFID) for products and data-driven tracking technologies will be adopted. The industry will become 'paperless' with information being electronically transferred between companies, between supply chain companies and government agencies, and between customers and their supply chain companies or government agencies. "Collaborative supply chain partnerships will become more apparent, particularly with larger, international firms," says Robert MacDonald from Ports of Auckland.

Environmental concerns and sustainable activities will shape the industry in the future. "Businesses will have to be aware, track and report their carbon footprint. This is already happening or starting to happen, both nationally and internationally," says Peter Garnett, chairman of CILT NZ's Northern Section and currently CEO of Abel Software Ltd, who became involved in the



*Micheal Hensley doing an interview for Just the Job, a television series for TVNZ that gives teenagers an insight into a range of career paths – this episode included the freight forwarding industry*

industry for its dynamic and critical component in the economic well-being of our country.

## Aging workforce

How can we bring young talent into an industry which has no X-factor attached to it? Do we have an extensive set of skills and competencies in the industry? Yes, but not enough.

There are not enough people in the industry with the skills necessary to take this industry ahead. It is a widely known reality that the New Zealand workforce is aging. To add to this, a lot of New Zealanders are leaving the country for greener pastures. Of the Kiwis who are returning home, not many prefer to join this industry due to perceived lack of appeal.

This is the concern of the industry at the moment. "Industry has an aging workforce which over the next five to ten years will need to be replenished. Without attracting new employees, we may have a shortage of staff in the near future," says Matt Kidman, Axis Transport, Ports of Auckland.

According to Statistics New Zealand, since March 2002 workers in the transport sector have increased by 15 percent from 61,000 to 71,000 people. Similarly, people in the wholesale sector have increased 14 percent from 96,000 to 110,000. These figures indicate growth in the logistics and transport sector.

Workers do not want to remain employed in the same role and organisation for the long term. "One of the reasons for this shortage is a limited career path within the logistics and transport industry," says Chin-Boo Soon, a logistician by vocation and a researcher at the University of Auckland.

## Building the workforce

It's no surprise then that in New Zealand there are at least 29,000 people unemployed (the estimated total number of people unemployed in the June 2008 quarter was 85,000) between the age group of 20 to 29. This is the age group that could be absorbed in the logistics and transport industry in the future. But how is this achievable?

Using migrant skills may be an option. In fact, if companies don't start thinking in that direction, it won't be long before there is an acute labour shortage in the industry. Several migrants have a good blend of skills which can be drawn upon to fill the gap in the industry.

Developing a programme of circulating young staff through various positions in their first two years or so is a good way to develop skills and retain staff. According to Tristan Anderson, business development manager at Ports of Auckland, "the reality is that we are trying to fill old-fashioned positions with young people. I think the positions and the variability of the tasks need

to be tailored to attract the younger generation."

## A mental shift

Most members of the U35 Group seemed to agree that to remain attracted to the industry in the long run, a revamp of the sector is necessary in the form of a review of the monetary benefits, growth and career advancements, ongoing learning provisions, effective staff-retaining strategies, and easier progress up the corporate ladder. Attracting this generation requires a mental shift away from thinking that pay is the primary motivator for career choice.

Adding glamour to the sector may attract the right skills. The industry needs to be more 'exciting' – to create a bigger buzz around itself in the same way that telecommunications and IT industries have achieved. "There is a perception that few companies in the industry are innovative, modern and sources of career progression or development", says Mr MacDonald.

Branding is another critical area to explore. Proactive brand management is lacking in the New Zealand industry compared to Australia and other developed countries. Being known as an 'industry of choice' can attract the right individuals. Suhail Sequeira, chairperson of the U35 Group, says: "People outside the industry do not perceive the industry as professional. This image needs to change given that there is a primary link between suppliers and buyers, domestic and international companies, New Zealand and the world."

For this, aggressive brand campaigns in the form of expos, roadshows, conferences and advertisements could be a way of making a beginning, as would investing in the Internet and using web tools such as blogs, pod casts and videos as a medium to attract the younger generation. Career portals are strategic to finding the right talent. Employers in the industry need to develop such online portals to advertise jobs, and job seekers can put their resumes on them. This will open the doors to global younger talent.

## Education

Another channel is the education sector. Engaging schools and tertiary institutes in training skilled people in careers for this industry is important. "We need to get into schools and inform kids. Kids tell peers and they take information back home to share with the entire family," suggests Micheal Hensley, northern regional training advisor for Tranzqual ITD. The New Zealand education sector needs to adopt a modern, comprehensive model that incorporates the growing depth and scope of the discipline.

This generation expects a workplace that encourages them to take an active part in achieving sustainability goals. Engaging in meaningful work may not only increase job satisfaction, but may even increase life expectancy. Companies will need to promote clear opportunities for this idealistic generation to make an impact to attract new talent.

Says Mr Sequeira: "Prospective professionals need to understand that their skills and knowledge are enhanced by working in every department within a company either through an apprenticeship, cadetship or graduate programme."

The message is start young and keep the flame burning!

*Sangeeta Anand is an experienced writer based in Auckland, New Zealand. She can be contacted at [sanand@theglobalindian.co.nz](mailto:sanand@theglobalindian.co.nz)*

