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Name:
Chris Cooper

Job title:
Managing Director

Company:
Panalpina World Transport Ltd.

Pathway:
Managing Director/CEO



What does your current role entail on a day-to-day basis?

Day-to-day I have a wide variety of responsibilities ranging from owning and managing the company's profit and loss statement for the UK and Ireland, to acting as a trusted advisor, sharing my experience and knowledge with colleagues. I always try and direct people towards a shared vision and show them how to get there.

In this industry absolutely anything could happen during a typical working day and it is up to me to ensure that controls, processes and procedures are in place to keep the business running smoothly.

How did you start in the industry?

When I was in secondary school my mother was working as company secretary for a privately owned forwarding and logistics organisation. I found the industry

really interesting and would regularly visit her office for a chat with the owner.

After leaving school I decided to enrol on a shipping documentation course at Aston College, which included day release at the German-based ocean transportation carrier Hapag-Lloyd.

During this time the company launched their first ever three-year management apprenticeship. I applied and was accepted on the programme in 1986 moving from my parents' house in the Midlands to Barking in Essex.

Could you describe your career journey?

After gaining experience at Hapag-Lloyd I continued my career with another carrier, taking a job at Mitsui O.S.K Lines – a Japanese transport company.

In 1994 I decided it was time to take a leap of faith and joined Kuehne + Nagel, leaving the carriers for a career in freight forwarding.

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During my time with Kuehne + Nagel I gained experience in a number of different positions, providing me with the opportunity to live in a variety of locations including London, Scotland and Sweden.

It was also with Kuehne + Nagel that I took my first Managing Director role when I joined the company's Swedish team in 2008.

After sixteen years with Kuehne + Nagel, I decided to leave for pastures new and joined Panalpina's Nordics team in 2012. I made the move back to the UK in 2014 and have been working as the company's Managing Director for the UK and Ireland for the past four years.

What have been the highlights of your career?

When I joined Kuehne + Nagel's Nordics team in 2008 they were losing a significant amount of money. But two years later, under my leadership they announced a record year - that was a fantastic achievement.

Another highlight is the fantastic countries I have had the chance to visit. Since joining the industry I have spent time in the United States, Asia, Germany and Sweden, to name just a few.

Looking back, how valuable was the early part of your career?

My apprenticeship was first class. It exposed me to senior management at a tender age, who acted as fantastic mentors.

The coaching and training offered was significant and ranged from fun outward-bound weeks to valuable skill-based courses.

During my apprenticeship I managed to spend time in every department and travelled internationally learning about lots of different leadership styles and cultures.

It really was invaluable and stood me in good stead for a successful career in the industry.

How important is support from colleagues?

Extremely important! The most successful teams are those that regularly collaborate and challenge each other.

Why should someone consider a career in this industry?

I've been in the industry for over 30 years and it has provided an exciting career and a variety of enjoyable roles.

Plus, I believe things are only going to get more exciting due to digitisation. The industry is slow at embracing change but business disrupters, such as Amazon, are finding different and smarter solutions to the way we usually do things so I foresee a huge acceleration in digitisation in the years to come.

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