

## Inspiring Women Case Study

### Lynn Parnell

- **Could you introduce yourself and your current role?**



Hello I am Lynn Parnell and I have been an independent Logistics consultant since August 2000 when I started my business Logistics Partners. I help my clients select; implement; operate efficiently and effectively; and integrate Supply Chain systems. My job is very varied depending on the assignment and customer - sometimes I am on the warehouse floor training new procedures or software, and sometimes I am in the boardroom advising on new processes or software. My customers also vary from large wholesalers and retailers to small 3PLs. I recently worked with a ferry operator where the shops move so delivering late is not an option! One of my main roles is to translate between users, developers/implementers and management, to ensure everyone understands what is required and why.

- **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

I really like the variety of my work, both in industries and locations. I really enjoy the adrenaline rush of a go-live situation, and though the hours can be long and anti-social and it can be stressful I get to see real results from my work in relatively short time frames.

- **What was your first job?**

My first part time jobs were serving behind a bar and doing market research to pay my way through A-levels and university. I was lucky enough to get a placement on the Shell STEP program one summer during university, and not only did I get paid but this was also my first exposure to how supply chains works, My job was to co-ordinate the testing of some new Manufacturing Software for John Smedley Mills in Derbyshire. My first full time role was as a Graduate Management Trainee with BOC Distribution services (BOCDS), now Gist, which gave me exposure to several areas of the logistics business and also some great general business training.

- **How many years have you worked in Logistics/Supply Chain?**

This summer I will have been in Logistics 20 years

- **Over the course of your career, what variety of roles have you worked in?**

With BOCDS I spent the first few weeks as a warehouse operative, developing skills I have used many times since. With BOCDS I also spent time in the personnel department and held the roles of Warehouse Supervisor, Transport Planner and Business Systems Analyst. I then worked for a number of Warehouse Management Software Providers (WCSS, EXE & ITI) where my jobs included Implementation Specialist, Software Developer, Customer Services Co-ordinator, Project Manager and Technical Manager.

- **Thinking back over your career, what have been the key steps forward you have made?**

I think there are three key steps I have made during my career so far:

- Choosing a Graduate Management Training scheme rather than going into Research like most of my university friends, as I did a Biology degree. This gave me a chance to work in an industry I knew nothing about previously, but which has suited my skills and temperament so well.
- Leaving BOCDS and moving to a software house to learn to code. This was a sideways move at the time but means that I now have real experience of all parts of an implementation project. After less than a year I found I was not suited to full time coding, but still keep my hand in, I think it ensures I understand all areas of the projects I manage and I can also "mediate" between users and techies.
- Setting up my own business, this has given me the freedom to work on a range of projects that would not have been possible while working for a single company and also given me a chance to balance my life a bit more

- **How have you come to recognize the importance of these developments later on?**

At each time I made the steps because they “just felt right at the time” I did not have a “big career plan”. But now I can see that probably my most significant move was to move from business to technical aspects for a while, as being able to have empathy with both these areas has enabled me to have the credibility I now have with my customers, and therefore a successful business.

- **Have there been any times where being a woman has been an advantage or disadvantage in your career?**

I have been in male dominated environments since the age of 16 by choosing science A-levels and then going to a university where 83% of the students were male. I have not experienced any problems with this. Instead I have often found that being a woman has been an advantage as I stand out from the crowd of men sometimes.

- **Are there any areas of experience or skills, which you believe are vital to career success generally?**

Being able to communicate effectively with people whoever they are and whatever level they are in the business. My role will require working with a picker on the warehouse floor one minute and presenting to the board the next, I don't treat them any differently. I also believe that continuing to educate yourself is really important and I am a strong supporter of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Last year I studied for a Logistics Diploma and passed with distinction. This enabled me to learn more about areas of the supply chain I had not had exposure to and this year I have got a contract in one of these areas.

- **What has been the highlight of your career so far and why?**

My first major project after setting up my own business was to Project Manage the Supply Chain Systems changes required for the change over to the Euro for a large Irish wholesaler. This involved working with all areas of the business, and systems I had not been exposed to before. It was also a project that had a fixed deadline and no chance of backing out if things hadn't worked.

- **Has networking played a role? (Informal groups and/ official gatherings) How has this benefited you over the years?**

I was really poor at networking until I joined Women In Logistics; in fact it was something I was not comfortable with. But since joining and taking lots of advice from Ruth, it is now something I enjoy, and I can see that it is of real value to my business. It is something I should have started earlier.

- **How would you advise members of Women in Logistics to get the most out of their personal and professional networks?**

Try and find ways to keep in contact with people you meet; LinkedIn is really good for this. I find my network really useful for identifying someone to refer customer enquiries to.

- **One of the areas that Women in Logistics members frequently ask about is mentoring. What role do mentors or coaching managers play in supporting career progression?**

I have never had the chance of a mentor prior to joining Women in Logistics. I think that a mentor can give you someone independent to bounce ideas off for a sense check.

- **Do you have a mentor yourself or act as a mentor to others?**

I act as a mentee to two people: one male and one female. I gain as much from the mentoring relationship as they seem to. It is a great way to be able to pass on experiences but also a great way to learn as well.

- **What is your vision for women in the logistics industry of the future?**

I really hope that Women in Logistics and other organisations can persuade more women that Logistics can be a really good career. Then in the future it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman in Logistics, we are just all Logisticians.

- **What are your career aspirations for the future?**

I just hope that my business continues to be a success and I can continue to be involved in varied and interesting Logistics projects.