

Inspiring Women Case Study

Ruth Waring

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



Hi there, I am the Managing Director of Labyrinth Logistics Consulting Ltd. A lot of my work is with hauliers, helping them to work more efficiently and ensuring that they comply with all the legal requirements associated with running a transport fleet, for example complying with Health & Safety legislation and Transport Law. I also help transport operators write procedures to explain what they do, which can be surprisingly complex. In addition I work with manufacturers and retailers, helping them to save money on their transport costs and buy transport more effectively. As MD I also run the Labyrinth consultancy business, which has 4 Directors, and I am the Founder and current Chair of Women in Logistics UK.

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

There is amazing variety – one day I can be getting the train to London to meet a large manufacturer at a posh office, and another I can be wading through mud in a pot-holed haulage yard doing a health & safety audit for a tanker company. I also love the fact that I am self-employed, and therefore am responsible for winning the vast majority of the work I do – which can mean doing presentations to the Boards of big companies. In the past couple of years my business partner Jo Godsmark and I have won quite a few big contracts and it gives you a massive buzz. I have to be able to walk into lots of different environments and fit in straightaway.

- **What was your first job?**

When I left Edinburgh University in 1989 I worked as an NFC Graduate Trainee, like lots of others in the logistics industry! I was employed by Exel Logistics Fashionflow, which looked after M&S contract. After the training year, where I was one of 10 women in an NFC intake of 90, I worked at the Exel Distribution Centre near Paris, as a Project Manager, introducing computers into the DC for the first time and training all the staff in French. That was an assignment for 1 year after that I elected to return to the UK and work as a Traffic Manager at the Exel depot in Coventry, in charge of 50 LGV 1 drivers. This involved working 3 different shifts in rotation: earlies, lates and nights.

- **How many years have you worked in Logistics?**

Twenty years

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

While Traffic Manager at Exel, I also implemented the quality management system called (back then) BS5750. In 1993 I moved to Gefco UK, the logistics arm of Peugeot Citroen, and had a project management role taking a massive spare parts distribution contract in-house. After maternity leave in 1996 I moved across to work on Gefco's European Roadfreight operation – my French has always come in handy. Finally I was promoted to Midlands Regional Manager. In 2000 I left for Pearson Education, a massive book publisher, where I was Transport Logistics Manager, in charge of getting 50m academic text books into bookshops in both the UK and across the world. This took me into air and sea freight for the first time. In 2002 I started my own business, and have not looked back.

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

There was a key moment early on at Exel when I knew I had to toughen up if I was going to hack it, so I decided to adopt a work persona to get me through. The role at Gefco was fantastic for stretching me in lots of different directions, and I was trusted and left to get on with what was a massive project. I still use my experience from that role to this day. At Pearson I learned a lot about transport costs and about how to deal with different types of people. I was also always conscious that I wanted to go self-employed one day, so I kept doing courses no-one else wanted to do, like H&S and Dangerous Goods Safety Advisor. This enabled me to offer a broad portfolio of skills when I set up my business, and this has been the key to my success.

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

My boss at Pearson was an amazing woman who challenged me a lot and I found it tough at the time, but I also quote her all the time and learned a vast amount from her.

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

I had a hard time after I had had my first child, as people assume you're going to want another one, so you tend to get overlooked for promotion. At one point I was told I would be promoted only on condition that I didn't have another baby for 2-3 years, which I found very difficult to cope with. I had my second child in 2004, which meant a massive gap, but by then I was self-employed and no-one could make my life a misery for being pregnant. On the positive side, people do remember you and I think it helps at interview, where you become really memorable.

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

Being able to handle all different types of people is hugely important in this industry – and I can't say I am always the best. I still find it hard to know what to say to certain drivers who are intent on embarrassing you.

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

Going self employed and making a success of it is hugely important to me. Also, in the past year I am very proud to have set up Women in Logistics UK, and also to have won the Women on their Way award for woman in a non-traditional role.

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

Yes, I am networking Queen! I have only got into this since going self-employed but really recommend it for those on the way up.

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

Find a Mentor and use them, go to all the events you can, get known!

- **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 haven't really benefited from that apart from the female boss at Pearson. I wish I had had a mentor when I was younger. I might have been a bit more confident in my abilities.

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

Not right now, but I am on the list for when the WIL mentoring scheme starts _ I'd like to be both a mentor and a mentee.

- **Of the successful women you have worked with, what would you say are the important qualities that support their career development?**

The ability to manage people is so critical, and I am not great at it. I realised this fairly early on so being a consultant suits me better, But if you want to climb the ladder in big organisations, this is key.

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

To carry on the work within WIL, to get more women into the industry and look after the ones who are there. It's still very tough.

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

I am happy running my business!