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Current Issue



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Transportation Supervisor Profile

Rob Hunnam

By Sue Dickson

Emigrating from England to make a life for himself with his new wife Lynne, leaving family and friends behind, Robert Hunnam has found his place in the world of trucking as the transportation supervisor for Canada Safeway Limited., in Winnipeg.

"This company supplied me with a great opportunity to create a wonderful career for myself and I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for them," says Robert, from his office. He won't readily admit it, but Robert has worked very hard to get where he is today.

very hard to get where he is today. A struggling diesel mechanic apprentice, he came to Canada to finish his training and make his fortune. "I was just a young man trying to find my way in life when I left England to continue my education here and well, the rest as they say is history," he comments. His decision to come to Canada "to the land of opportunity" was made in 1974. Three decades later he has a job he loves in a country he is proud to call home. "I thought upon my job and I enjoy the company I work for. It was though they are a big corporation and one would think you might just become a number, the bottom line is there are times when you realize you are not ...

that the company does appreciate your efforts," he says. And that is exactly what Canada Safeway Limited has done.

COST-CUTTING EFFORTS RECOGNIZED

A few years ago Robert was presented with the company's Outstanding Achievement Award. It was given to him, with the blessing of their US head office, for his cost-cutting efforts. "When we started to see some of our biggest savings coming through, that is when they decided to give me the award," he says humbly. "It was a complete surprise. It was presented at a company dinner to which I had been invited



Cover Story

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For Robert it meant recognition for his hard work.

Not bad for a guy who started out working on the floor, earning his way through the ranks to become lead hand then shop-co-ordinator and now transportation supervisor.

"You have to constantly strive to do well in your job . . . you have to always have your focus on the job and how you can do it better," he explains.

Robert's drive to constantly try new things in the hopes of finding ways to reduce costs has led him to some very interesting finds.

"Every day stuff comes across my desk and you have to be able to sift through the ideas, if some of those ideas can help reduce the company's bottom line then that is what I am looking for," he comments.

TWO PRODUCTS MADE THE DIFFERENCE

Two products according to Robert have helped him make a difference. The first is KleenOil, a product he learned about while vacationing in Toronto. "I came across a number of shops that use this system - and then met with

"I am very sincere when I say this - it is the guys on the floor that carry the load. I am just a figurehead. However I am the one they come to when they have problems or ask questions about parts and so on - they are the ones who do the work," he adds.

And Robert recognizes what it is his mechanics have to deal with on a daily basis, having been one himself. He has three mechanics on staff and one general laborer who he wants to put through the apprenticeship program. They work out of four service bays maintaining the company's fleet of Internationals, which includes 11 city trucks, three yard trucks and 81 trailers.

"We seem to have come full circle. When I started we had approximately 11 trucks and about eight trailers. At one point we had close to 50 trucks and 130 trailers but over the last few years we took a hard look at our fleet only to realize that our equipment utilization wasn't where it should be.

"My mechanics are good people. They know what they have to do to get the job done and that's the key. In fact my office is not even attached to the shop. It is under the same roof, but I am in a group of offices located at the front of the building because I have other duties to perform as well," he explains. Robert was also in charge of the company's salvage warehouse which included store returns, recycled cardboard, recycled plastic and product destined for compost.

Working out of his office in Winnipeg, the company has two other locations, one in Edmonton and one in Calgary, all of which are truck, trailer and reefer servicing facilities.

There is another one in Vancouver but that's run by a third party.

"We are a distribution centre, like the others.

The grocery chain is North America wide and encompasses an entire group of companies.

For Robert and his crew, the focus is on keeping things moving.

"I feel sorry for my mechanics because I know what they are going through - it was -20 degrees outside yesterday and I had one of my guys outside on their back under a trailer trying to get the brakes freed up," says Robert.

"On days like that I sure don't miss being on the floor and I have to admit that it's times like those that I look forward to sitting at my desk," he adds with a huge grin.

TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Today Robert's challenge includes staying up to date with the latest technology and staying focused on reducing costs. "We are constantly looking at different products and ways of doing

Barry Phillips, he gave me a system to try out. After a year of testing this product it provided me with enough positive data that it was essential to continue with it," says Robert.

My manager at the time told me on a number of occasions if we can see a payback within three years it should be a no brainer. "Well payback was in 10 months. The first year we reduced our oil change costs by \$22,000. That was incredible," he exclaims.

The second product to have a substantial impact on the company's bottom line is CPL's automatic greasing system by Groeneveld. "Their product was a no brainer also . . . but you have to be able to weed out what is the snake oil type of product and what it is that will actually work," says Robert with a huge grin.

TECHNICIANS BACKBONE OF THE COMPANY

But Robert is the first one to admit he is not the only reason for successes at his company.

"It is not all about me - it is about the people that work in my shop. They are part and parcel of what goes on. The mechanics themselves are the backbone to what I am trying to achieve," he states. "All I am is the glue - I try to hold it together - we do the best we can," he adds humbly.

In fact Robert spoke more about his mechanics than anything else during the interview.

business" he comments.

"We are constantly upgrading . . . for example, a corporate decision was made to upgrade the shop computers so that the mechanics can do their own data entry. We are always trying to find ways to achieve our goals and then go one step further. Times change, technology changes, we have to be willing to move along with all of that and more," he adds.

Whether it is looking at new ways of doing business or implementing cost-saving measures, it is all part of working smarter, not harder according to Robert.

ONE MORE 'BEST KEPT SECRET' TO SHARE

In keeping with his penchant for staying on top of the latest technology and his focus on saving money, Robert has one of, what might be considered, the 'best kept secrets' in the industry, one that he is sharing.

"It's simple. Chase your warranties," he says. As a result of his efforts to catalogue and keep track of every piece of equipment on the fleet, everything from headlights to wiper blades, the company has seen a savings of approximately \$10,000 annually.

"Think of it - every part you use comes with a warranty attached no matter where you get it, if you are buying 300 headlights every year and one of them burns out, how do you know if it's under warranty or not? Well that is where technology comes in to play, it has saved our company money, this is not something new, if you have the tools to do it, and thanks to my company for supplying those tools he explains."

"This is why I am so passionate about technology and about saving money," he concludes with a grin.

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