

LOG TRUCK DESPATCHING - A DESPATCHERS VIEW

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Born and educated in the Whakatane district. Early education in small country schools, Manawahe, Matata, Edgcumbe, Rotoiti. From Standard Two onwards attended schools in Whakatane. Left school at 15, halfway through fourth form year to begin work on a dairy farm. One year later the idea of being paid to ride a horse around all day seemed the ultimate in jobs, so moved to a Land and Survey sheep and cattle station in the Rotorua district as a Junior Shepherd. A fortnight later after 4 am starts and 8 pm knock offs during the mastering season reality had struck home, this was damn hard work. Winter months saw an easing of the work load but the worry of a lambing beat and ensuring that stock losses were kept to a minimum.

Eighteen months later the offer of an Butchery apprenticeship saw me moving into Rotorua. After completing my apprenticeship, decided I needed to further my education so a year at the New Zealand Missionary College at Palmerston North followed, with thoughts of a career in the Ministry. Any belief in my suitability as a Church Minister were quickly dispelled when I was asked not to return for the following year. However the year was not entirely wasted, as it was there I met my wife. Another brief stint on a Dairy Farm followed. Drew the ballot and six months compulsory Military training came next. When discharged spent 18 months in the

Rotoma area, fence contracting before joining

Tasman Pulp and Paper Company as a Timber Yard Worker. Nineteen years later after working throughout the Timber Yard and Sawmill in various positions including Leading Hand, Foreman and Flow Controller, left in 1983 to face the reality of owning my own business. After a brief and spectacular failure as a small businessman shut up shop and worked in a supermarket as a butcher. In early 1985 applied for and was appointed Weighbridge Supervisor at Kawerau for Tasman Forestry. Six months later during a general strike at Kawerau Mill I was asked to move to Murupara and fill in at their new centralised despatch when one of their despatchers left suddenly. Nine years later, two of them as Senior Despatcher the opportunity arose to move to Forestry Corporation to take charge of their despatch operation. The position I currently hold with the Forestry Corporation is Senior Despatch Controller.

Despatching is only now starting to come in to the computer age, within the next two or three years I would expect

WHAT A DESPATCHER DOES.

1. Provides customers with on time deliveries of correct grades.
2. Ensures there is effective stock rotation to minimise value loss by down grading because of age.
3. Implements effective uplift plans to cope with market surges.
4. Provides bush contractors and trucking contractors with the opportunity to maximise use of invested capital by allowing them to work to their full potential.
5. Takes advantage of all cost effective means of delivery to customers to maximise returns to shareholders .
6. Provides accurate information on delivery status to all customers.

The Forest has now become a giant supermarket so to provide customers with the service they require a very close working relationship with trucking firms and owner drivers is necessary. The despatcher is in constant contact with all truck drivers by radio or telephone and any driver may be required to uplift and deliver an urgent load, even though it may not be his usual work. This is provided he has the log book hours left to him for that particular day.

FLOW OF INFORMATION

most companies will have perfected a despatch system relevant to their needs. This should take a lot of the pressure that a manual system of recording places on a despatcher away.

Currently customer requirements are written up on a white board with daily targets set for each customer. At the end of each day actual deliveries are written up and new targets set for the rest of the week.

Problems with stock availability are passed onto logging for their attention.

Customers are kept informed of their order status and any urgent requirements are given priority.

To be able to meet customer requirements despatch must know where stocks are, constant contact with the loader drivers at each gang enables stock to be continually updated and grades in demand are picked up as soon as a load is produced. Premium grades have a shelf life of only two or three days and must be uplifted and processed before exceeding their use by date. (ie. delivered to customers or peeled and anti sap stained sprayed to extend their shelf life). Grades less in demand must also be moved and stockpiled pending sale in order to allow bush contractors to work to their potential.

Accurate records of all deliveries must be kept as a check that the correct number of loads have been delivered to the correct customers. To do this the despatcher must record all deliveries on a customer sheet and a truck day sheet. These sheets also give a check against docket and weigh bridge data.

The advent of mobile telephone has helped lighten the work load considerably. Most truckies now arrange their own maintenance, repairs and driver changes themselves but there is still a constant flow of radio and telephone calls to be answered.

WHAT THE PRESSURE IS LIKE

The pressure in the job is what I imagine the pressure is like for air traffic controllers. A mistake by a despatcher may not put lives in jeopardy, but poor despatching can certainly effect the financial well being of the contractor and his family. The dispatcher must be scrupulous in his sharing out of the good and bad jobs and must ensure that everyone takes their turn at picking up some of the more difficult to access logs.

The pressure is constant and comes from all directions, your boss, customers, marketing and sales, logging supervisors, truck drivers, bush contractors, and loader drivers. All have demands that they expect the despatcher to meet. At any given time in the day someone is unhappy with your performance, so the despatcher must be resilient and able to concentrate on many problems at once.

WHEN RECRUITING A DESPATCHER

Merely showing people what a despatcher does eliminates about seventy five percent of those interested, they simply decide that the job is not for them.

My preference would be someone with a good knowledge of the industry or similar industries. They must be helpful and conscientious, the only thing that stops a despatcher coming to work is loss of voice or death. A good clear speaking voice and the ability to concentrate for long periods are a must. Once on the job you are there for the whole shift, you cant decide to wander off for half an hour if the pressure gets too great.

It takes six to eight months for a despatcher to become competent and up to eighteen months to become proficient, so you need someone who sees the job as long term not as a stepping stone.

No one, not even these with prior knowledge of the job have been prepared for the pressure and intensity of the job when they first start despatching so it is a matter of heaps of support and encouragement when they first start. It is also important that they understand the job gets easier with experience. The first month on the job needs to be spent familiarising them with gang locations, truck call signs, customer requirements, special deals, voice recognition and how to plan early starts. Then it is into the hot seat alongside an experienced despatcher who will plan the uplift but let the new despatcher give the truck directions.

Once the new despatcher feels they can go it alone the experienced despatcher will take a back seat and only intervene when a wrong decision has been made. It is now up to the individual to take control, how long this takes will depend on how confident the person is. Despatch is all about being prepared to accept that you are going to make mistakes and that these mistakes will be transparent. Most despatchers are not remembered for the thousands of good decisions they made but for the few really bad ones and around these, time and exaggeration have built legends.

As you can see from my personal background I have had a fairly varied working life. Despatching is by far the most demanding but also the most satisfying job I have done. I thank both Tasman Forestry and Forestry Corporation for allowing me to be part of an exciting and interesting era of Forestry and Trucking.

THE GOOD AND BAD POINTS OF THE JOB

The job is never boring and the satisfaction at the end of a shift when things have gone well is something you rarely get in other jobs. Everything is there to quantify, customer requirements met, uplift priorities met, truck driver earnings okay. Its like the feeling you get when you have finished a marathon, you don't have to be the best but the fact you have hung in there and finished the job is what matters.

The downside of the job is that lack of recognition given to the despatchers importance in the companies ability to meet deadlines and ensure customer satisfaction, though I believe this is quickly changing. Burnout is a reality of the job, the pressure can become too much and time out doing other things must be allowed for. Despatch aids, including computer assistance will help ease this factor.