

Lisa Schraer – Building a career in logistics through creativity, curiosity and collaboration



Lisa Schraer, Senior Vice President, Operations for Allport Cargo Services, a six-year-young independent 3PL and provider of end-to-end supply chain and logistics solutions in Bloomfield, NJ, has established herself as a leader in this male-dominated industry. Known for her entrepreneurial spirit and personal attention she gives every customer, Lisa is also committed to mentoring and developing the next generation of logistics professionals. It may appear she was born for this job, but like most women in the industry, her path was not a straight line.

As a high school student, Lisa Schraer was not planning to apply her creativity, writing skills and affable personality to the world of logistics. In fact, she had never heard of logistics.

Instead, she planned to follow in her father's footsteps, setting her sights on an exciting career in advertising. After securing a degree in communications with a minor in advertising from Glassboro State University (now Rowan University), she scored her first job at a boutique ad agency, where she was ready to light the world on fire. Much to her surprise, advertising turned out not to be the path that would allow her to fully showcase her creativity. So, did she move on to a career in logistics at that point? No. From the ad agency, Lisa segued into the world of fashion, which seemed like an ideal environment to spread her wings creatively.

If you are looking to begin a career in fashion, Federated Department Stores (FDS) was THE place to start. Lisa joined FDS as an assistant to a female VP, who immediately saw something special in her and offered Lisa the opportunity to elevate her role within the company by either working in the buying department or the logistics department. After hearing the job descriptions, she was intrigued by the sound of the logistics job and made the life-changing decision to give it a shot.

On day one of her new role, Lisa met her mentor, Jim Bloise, who would shape her career by implementing his own Logistics 101 crash course. Committed to teaching her all he knew, Jim provided Lisa with one-on-one training that built a foundation upon which she would build her career. Lisa's experience with a generous mentor demonstrated how important it is for leaders to share their time, talent and experience with the next generation to ensure they are prepared to grow.

Soon after joining the team, Lisa would put her Logistics 101 training to the test. Her mentor moved on from FDS and, at the age of 24, Lisa was now managing the logistics department. Armed with the right training, Lisa knew this was her opportunity to build a career that would combine her creativity with her writing and people skills as well as her newly formed business acumen.

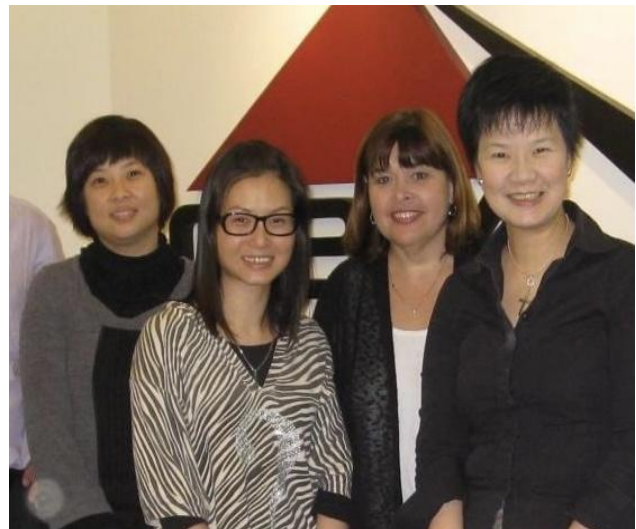
“I knew this was a big undertaking, but I was intrigued and excited about everything logistics and I was keenly aware that opportunities like this don’t come along every day. I was young, I was motivated and I was eager to learn, so I took the ball and ran with it,” said Lisa.

Lisa worked with stakeholders throughout the supply chain, forming strong relationships she would keep until this day. One group she worked closely with was Associated Merchandising Corp (AMC), the agent that performed all the logistics for FDS. After seven years of working together, AMC scooped Lisa up with an offer she could not refuse. AMC needed a leader with tenacity and an entrepreneurial spirit to lead their west coast operations and Lisa was the perfect fit. She moved to the west coast and began handling the inbound logistics coming into the biggest ports in the United States.

“I knew the key to success would be building and developing the right team. The training was going to be from the ground up--looking at things like packing, labels and customs. I had been given the gift of a dedicated mentor who took my training seriously and I was ready to make that same commitment to my team,” said Lisa.

As she honed her leadership and team-building skills, Lisa learned the importance of encouraging members of the team to take a proactive role in their growth, to initiate solutions and then see them through to the end. It may seem easier to solve the problems presented to new hires, but that is not how they grow or how you develop a strong, loyal team.

A strong team would become crucial as Lisa spent more and more time traveling globally, often to countries that often did not welcome female leadership into their meetings. Lisa had to learn quickly how to navigate the different personalities throughout the world by immersing herself into their cultures.



Lisa with Ms. Ming Luk and Ms. Suki Yeung – also part of their 'first' team back in 1999. Still together leading their HK operations.



Lisa and Ms. May Ma, her Hong Kong counterpart, left-hand and work-sister. Lisa and Ms. Ma have managed operations together since 1999.

Lisa learned early on to not take cultural differences personally. It was much more productive to embrace these differences, show respect for personal beliefs and be sure to have the right team with her to open doors and start a dialogue. This approach to working with colleagues, vendors, suppliers and customers around the world helped her build long-standing partnerships as well as lifelong friendships, including her counterpart Ms. May Ma, who runs the Asia operations. For more

While Lisa enjoyed a successful run at AMC, she found herself presented with another offer she could not refuse—one that brought her back to her NJ roots. Friend and colleague Bill Aldridge contacted her to ask her to join his new company, United States Consolidation (USC) as head of operations. Over the next 20 years, through a series of mergers and acquisitions, Bill and Lisa along with several other colleagues moved together to other companies, including DHL, CEVA and Kuehne & Nagel.

In 2015, Bill went on his own again and launched Allport Cargo Services (ACS) and brought most of the 'A' team with him, along with Lisa, who oversees operations, implementation and, of course, is responsible for building the teams. On her leadership team are many lifelong colleagues and friends, including Ms. May Ma, Lisa's Asia counterpart, who runs the Asia operations. According to Lisa: "For more than 20 years, we 'followed the sun,' talking in the morning and the evening to hand off the day's work."

Currently, six-year-old ACS has grown to ~400,000 containers and competes every day with bigger companies, which may have more years under their belts, but certainly do not have a stronger leadership team or a more dedicated commitment to customer service.

"We all have an emotional connection to the success of our own business as well as that of our customers, each of whom we treat as a VIP," said Lisa. "Our customers have direct access to all members of our leadership team. Our philosophy is to promptly address issues so our customers see us as their problem solvers."

ACS is in growth mode, looking to build and develop teams that see the opportunities hard work can offer you in this industry. Lisa believes in the importance of diversity in her teams, understanding that different points of view make the team stronger. She knows from her own experience that there is tremendous opportunity for women in this business.

Learning how to navigate the heavily male-dominated and multicultural logistics industry was a skill that was developed over time and one that she feels compelled to teach her team. While learning the ropes in terms of processes and procedures was essential, she believes it was just as important to learn how to deal with people. After all, building relationships with people across

the globe--learning about their lives, their traditions, their challenges and opportunities--is part of the lure of the business.

And part of the lure of attracting young talent is the broad spectrum of opportunities available in the world of supply chain and logistics, especially for those interested in the global aspect of the industry. This is a business that will provide a dynamic career path for those who want to put in the work. ACS believes in building a strong foundation and invests in the future of the industry and has in place a comprehensive internship program with Rutgers, which allows interns to contribute to various aspects of the company.

Although Lisa has firm beliefs on how to train the team, she does not micromanage; she has learned that sometimes it's best to take a step back and allow team members to find their own way. The beauty of this business is that there are so many open doors that play to different strengths. Allowing the members of your team to find where they shine ensures each person feels a sense of satisfaction, knowing they have contributed to the success of the company.

Lisa is very quick to point out that the generation that is entering today's workforce is anything but lazy or entitled. They are, in fact, resourceful and hard working. Their comfort level with technology enables them to quickly answer questions, swiftly learn new skills and improve productivity unlike previous generations.

While Lisa prides herself on being a dedicated mentor to her team, she still appreciates being the protegee and is always hungry to learn more, which is another reason she loves this business--there is always more to learn.

"I am always up for a challenge and the logistics industry promises to give you at least one every day. There may be days that I could use a few less challenges, but it is better than being bored. I have been in this business for three decades and I still find it thrilling to be presented with a new 'crisis' that requires my team to dig deep to solve," said Lisa.

Lisa's approach to guiding her team combines leveraging her knowledge and expertise with the fresh ideas and can-do attitude of her team. She encourages the team to embrace a best practices approach that allows a sense of freedom to think differently and challenge the norm while consistently keeping the customer first.

As a leader, Lisa sets the tone and challenges her team to not only deliver results for their customers' current needs, but also to develop new ways to meet the needs that may be around the corner.

"Our customers come to us for our experience and expertise as well as our dedication to their success. This is a very competitive marketplace and that requires consistent, ongoing dedication to customer service," said Lisa. "We are personally invested in our customers' success, which is key to building our business and a fundamental difference between us and our competitors."