David J. Halliday is Managing Director & Partner at the Seafast Group, a dynamic freight forwarder with a focus for global integrated logistics. David and his team are specialists in seafarer shipping and providing solutions when delivering cargo to remote and challenging locations worldwide. Headquartered in Felixstowe (UK), the Seafast Group has regional offices in Dubai, UAE and Mombasa, Kenya.

Interview

What are your main responsibilities? My main responsibility is that of steering our ship on a voyage of profitable growth, avoiding troubled waters. From a background of providing shipping and logistics services to the British and Dutch Ministries of Defence, to and from Afghanistan via Pakistan (not the easiest of tasks) we began then diversifying the Company in late 2007 with the objective of growing our commercial customer base, from zero, into what is now a robust and sustainable solutions in our sectors.

Seafast Logistics have received numerous awards, more recently, the 2015 Queens Award for International Trade. What does it feel like to receive this recognition? Yes, we have achieved recognition along our voyage, including BIFA, Containerisation International industry awards between 2008 and 2012. Those were important for us as a young and growing logistics group. The Queens Award, was not linked only to our industry sector, but all sectors nationwide. The award was even more gratifying given Seafast was the only logistics company to win the award, and only one in all sectors in the region of our country, Suffolk. In fact, no one had won the award in Suffolk for the two years before Seafast. Winning the award was actually “the” highlight of our career, thus far. I and the company have other targets, which are currently in progress and very exciting!

Please describe your company’s key values: We are ambitious, and we do not consider size to be a disadvantage against the larger international forwarders. In fact, it is our advantage, being quick to adapt and react. We are not run by committees, and our key executives are the ones dealing with our customers on a very personalised basis. Larger forwarders, and certainly the shipping lines do not have our flexibility or ability to truly understand our customers exact needs, and the time to devote to real “bespoke” end to end solutions. Our customer base is testimony we can “out box our weight” and we will continue to do so.

We have a term we use which is “we are not simply another company, over a period of 17 years, is something I feel very privileged to have such opportunity. And actually being the industry sectors, youngest CEO at 38 years of age. The second is of course the Queens Award for Enterprise!! I am not sure other industry awards will ever mean the same.

Your memorable shipping experience: I struggle to put one of two as being the most memorable, so forgive my answer to this question. The first becoming entrusted as CEO of Contship, rising from a documentation clerk to the top of a special company, over a period of 17 years, is something I felt very privileged to have such opportunity. And actually being the industry sectors, youngest CEO at 38 years of age. The second is of course the Queens Award for Enterprise!! I am not sure other industry awards will ever mean the same.

What are the key elements that define the success of Seafast Logistics? We are UK based, but a large part of our business is cross-trade between locations outside the UK. In keeping with this focus we have a joint venture company in East Africa, called Seafast Africa, with focus beyond the port to port, inland from Mombasa.

Our second focus is “reformer shipping and logistics on a global platform”. In 2009 we moved away from ambient warehousing and into a specialist temperature controlled facility inside the port of Felixstowe, the UK’s largest container port. Seven years later we are now ready to expand that facility, the plan being x5 its present capacity by Q2 2018. Frozen products are the most handled.

In your opinion, what are the current and future challenges for international logistics? For the masses, the challenge will be differentiating their offer, and having the scale economics to be able to deliver the same but at more competitive prices. This will be the general challenge, but not ours. Our focus will remain steadfastly upon the areas of our specialisation, and which present considerable opportunity. We have a number of projects under development, which we look to implement soon.

Your favourite ship: Probably the MV Bold Eagle, which goes back to the days of Contship when that ship sailed on our round the world service including Australia, and actually had a massive “spinnaker” sail, which at certain points of the voyage would be raised to become wind assisted. Unique to my knowledge.

Please tell us about your experience in shipping & logistics and how this has added value to your current role: My personal background is one of Container Shipping, having spent 27 years in that sector. Starting as a documentation clerk in early 1980’s to the honour of becoming CEO of the same company in 1998. That company, Contship Containerlines was a fantastic learning experience, in a period when it was still possible to be pioneers of new trade lanes, such as that in 2000 when Contship launched the first ever direct, non-stop container service between Mumbai and New York. Now container shipping has become much more of a commodity, with most lanes saturated with competitors. That was the major appeal for moving into logistics. The shipping experience means we know how the carriers think, but can apply our knowledge to providing value added beyond those services traditionally offered by lines. This is usually linked to inland capabilities, and also our specialist offering of refrigerated shipping and handling.

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