

SPOTLIGHT

ON CHRIS FAULKNER



Angela Wilkins shines a light on our very own Shawston squad via the Spotlight series, a series of informal chats with key members of staff talking candidly about their roles with the Shawston group and how they have developed. It's simple really, aim the light and watch them shine.

It's Tuesday, it's early, but the early bird catches the worm or at least it catches Chris Faulkner before he starts a busy day running our Hyde office in Manchester.

Today I'm talking to Chris about his journey through Shawston. It's a first for us both, in these busy times it's a rarity to get to talk in-depth to people about what they watched on TV last night let alone their evolving path through our business. Besides Chris

has recently become a new father so it's more or less night-time for him now anyway...

Background

I had heard a lot about Chris Faulkner, he's somewhat of a Shawston inspiration, a true representation of Shawston's culture and values. Starting in 2013 as a Warehouse Operative at Tipton Jones, Salford now known as Shawston Steel Tube, Chris viewed Shawston as a temporary stop

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gap. Fast forward to 2020 and Chris now heads up the Customer Service Team at our Head Office branch in Hyde, Manchester. Quite a journey.

Plied with coffee and with matchsticks in his eyes Chris managed to fit me into his busy schedule and talk me through his Shawston career path so far, his learnings along the way and his plans on what he thinks his future holds.

Chris on Shawston

Working in the warehouse was a good grounding for me. I got to learn about all the products, how the warehouse operated and how the business runs from the basic grassroots level, but I never saw myself staying in the warehouse for long. I had other plans in mind, so when a job was advertised to join the Purchasing team in the office, I knew I had to apply. There were 3 of us that applied, we all had a week's trial to prove ourselves and the best person at the end of the trial got the job and that was me!

It was a big change for me to work in an office environment. I kept hearing people talking about gross profit, cash flow and many other things that basically I didn't have a clue about. I began to become really interested in business terminology and its meaning, so in my spare time I read lots of books and journals to broaden my knowledge and help me to do my job better. In fact I still have all those books, it's a real bug bear to my other half, but the books have real meaning to me. I'm not letting them go!

I spent 3 years in my purchasing role before I started to get itchy feet again. I've always believed that you've got to keep pushing yourself because that's how you grow, so I decided to apply for the role of Operations Manager. But this time I was worried. Can I do it? I would be managing people, transport and logistics

amongst other things and I had no experience. What if I messed it up? What if I wasn't good enough? Well I needn't have worried, because I learnt that everyone around you is so supportive at Shawston. If you want something you can go and get it. It's up to you. So, I thought, I'll give it a go. Let's go for it!

This is where my learnings from all the books I had read came into their own. I could put all that I had learnt into practice within my role in the business. I soon learnt what worked and what didn't work, which in turn gave me the freedom to exercise my own ideas and strategies. What is interesting is that I never really made much of an effort at school, but here I was as Operations Manager at one of our 5 nationwide branches and all because of the effort that I had put in and the belief that Shawston had in me. Amazing. This was a proud moment for me, within 18 months the branch was running more efficiently, I had decreased overheads and I had played a major part in the rebrand of Tipton Jones to Shawston Steel Tube. I didn't think it could get much better. I was wrong, my journey was far from over.

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As in all of our 5 branches we often see our external sales team popping in and out, driving orders, boosting product sales, building customer relationships. I was beginning to think about expanding my horizons within Shawston and I'd expressed an interest in becoming part of the external sales team. I have been really lucky in my Shawston career, I have been given the platform to do whatever I've expressed an interest in. The management team have listened to my wants and ambitions and they helped me fulfil

them. They've given me the chance to do it, I don't really think you would get that anywhere else. So began my 18 months on the road.

Wow! Being on the road was hard! My external sales role was one of the hardest jobs I've ever had, I now have a full appreciation for what a great job our sales team do. They are superstars. Living and breathing sales 24/7 isn't easy, but our guys make it look like a walk in the park. However, I'd hit that plateau again, so it was time for a change, time to push myself into a new direction.

So here I am, Customer Service Team Manager at our Head Office in Manchester. I am responsible for keeping our unrivalled customer service unrivalled and I love it. I see my career so far as an apprenticeship, I've been given a general sense of the business in each field I've found myself in, warehouse, purchasing, operations, sales and now customer service. I like managing people, I believe that's where my skills lie. I enjoy seeing new talent come through and helping them push on, encouraging them to fulfil their ambitions and passing on my knowledge and experience to others to help them prosper. It's such a great feeling to be able to pass on your learnings to

new, up and coming employees, joining up the circle. I see it as a two-way development, for them and for me.

Chris on Share Ownership

When I first joined Shawston it wasn't employee owned, but I always felt like an owner. I owned each role I had and carried it out to the best of my ability. In 2015 when the business became employee owned, I jumped at the chance of investing and truly owning a part of the company. Has it changed the way I work? I'll be honest and say no, it hasn't.

The best advice I was given by my mentors Mark Dyer and Mandy Collins back in my purchasing days was to treat it like your own money and now it is, nothing has changed for me there. Both of those guys instilled the basics of employee ownership in me from the very early stages in my career.

The big difference I've seen is in the culture, people are so much more engaged since we became employee owned. Our wastefulness is down, the team are suggesting more efficient ways to run our wagons, working later to avoid using agency staff and generating ideas to make our business more



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streamlined. We all want our business to succeed and make money, it's in everyone's best interests, I've even seen people change their holidays to ensure a job goes out on time. That's real discretionary effort right there or DE as we call it in Hyde!

I see DE day-in-day out at Hyde. People coming in early, staying late, working through lunch to make sure we continue to offer unrivalled customer service. I don't remember that before the business became employee owned, DE has changed the Shawston culture and empowered people to speak up without fear. Don't get me wrong it didn't happen overnight, but you can definitely see the benefits now.

Chris on Mentorship

I've been lucky enough to benefit from an open forum throughout my various roles within Shawston. Both Mark Dyer and Mandy Collins have been great sounding boards and advisors to me every step of the way. They've answered all my questions, provided advice, put up with my frustrations, celebrated my wins – I've learnt a lot from both of them and I would definitely say that Mandy has been my work mum, she has raised me in the business world!

Greatest Achievement

Running Tipton Jones (Shawston Steel Tube) without a doubt. I joined Shawston at 22 years old in the warehouse and by the time I was 25 I was running the whole branch. Pretty great moment that one.

No Barriers

Our industry is fast paced so having the freedom to make decisions underpins our ability to provide unrivalled customer service. There is no micromanagement at Shawston, you are empowered to take control and deliver on your decisions. There is a huge support network and when you see your own ideas materialising you get a huge sense of kudos. We really are a family in the true sense of the word – everyone cares, that's what's so enjoyable about coming into work each day.

I love Shawston. They have been so good to me. They brought me through the ranks and everything I have wanted to do Shawston have facilitated it. I love the people I work with; they are such a great team. It's humbling here, we're all really down to earth even the CEO Rob, he knows everyone's names and always has a chat with everyone when he's in the branch. You don't get many like that.

Chris on the future

There are opportunities everywhere here for the taking and I've set my sights on becoming a Director of the business – I've made this widely known. I want to have a big influence on where the business is going and where we can get it to. There is a seat on the board with my name on it and I'm on my way! I've had a good grounding so far, so in the meantime I'm going to continue to do the best job I can to make Shawston successful. We couldn't ask for better leaders of the business and in time I see myself standing at their side. ♦

Shawston has so many more amazing examples of meritocracy – sponsorship of MBA's, graduate development schemes, and a strong record for internal promotion to name just a few. And the common theme is that all these people made a choice – the choice to improve, to be better, to progress, and to shine. And that's the essence of Employee Ownership. We encourage a freedom of expression rarely seen in business, we push people to be better versions of themselves, and we give them the space to make choices.

So, if you're interested in a career with Shawston, make the choice to email us your cv and a covering letter to hr@shawston.co.uk or [visit our website](#) to read more about choosing to hop on board to a new career.

