

SPOTLIGHT

ON STUART PRIEST



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.

Today we are talking all things wood related with our very own master craftsman Stuart Priest. Starting out working for the world renown British furniture company G Plan in High Wycombe, he quickly honed his expertise, gaining skills and knowledge that would pave the way towards his future career.

Known as "The Woodblock Master" at Shawston, Stuart has carved out time to talk to me today about

woodblocks, wooden BBQs, and a recent addition to his skill set, the wooden phone stand.

Background

Quietly confident, that's how I'd describe Stuart. Working at Shawston since 2013, he has played a huge role in doubling the size of the wood shop and turning it into a huge part of the business. It's no mistake that he is at the helm of the woodblock

Knowing that I am adding to the success of my business by playing my part. That is a great feeling.

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making process, honing his skills. Each woodblock is produced from FSC sustainably sourced wood and is individually handmade, some call this process artisan, but Stuart is much more modest, now working in a team of three, he simply says “we know what needs doing and we get it done.”

Stuart on Shawston

Finding myself out of work back in 2013, I noticed the advert for a role at Shawston and applied straight away. After doing my pre interview research via their website I was still a little bit non plussed as to what exactly I would be doing there, and I also wondered why they wanted someone with skills in woodwork when at the time they only sold pipe and fittings.

I spent a day with the resident carpenter – Sam Batey – who told me what the job would entail and what exactly it was that I would be making – sustainable FSC woodblocks. Down to the final two candidates I left Shawston hoping I would be the chosen one for the role.

On my way to the Job Centre that afternoon I received a phone call offering me the job. Needless to say, I walked into the Job Centre with a spring in my step!

Straight from day one on the job I was given the opportunity to set up the wood shop how I wanted and to run it how I saw fit. I'm really proud that I was there at the beginning to help mould and develop this key part of the Shawston business, which is now double the size with a three-person strong team.

The culture of Shawston is to let you get on with it, if you've got the skills then you're able to get on with your job.

Don't get me wrong there is support along the way, but micromanagement really doesn't exist in this company. Little did I know back then that I would be

a key factor in developing the Shawston wood shop into the lean, mean, wood cutting machine it is today!

Stuart on Share Ownership

I invested into the share scheme as soon as I joined the business. I think now it's a prerequisite of taking a job at Shawston, but I definitely chose to do it myself back in the day. I like being a share owner and I take a great interest in how the company is doing, especially the wood shop. I like to know how the business is doing all year round.

I don't think it has changed my work ethic, but I am a lot more interested in the success of the company because I own part of it. I really enjoy being kept up to date and knowing that I am adding to the success of my business by playing my part. That is a great feeling.

Stuart on Mentorship

As the wood shop was a relatively new concept for the Shawston business back in 2013, I was entrusted from the beginning to carve my own path – no pun intended.

Now, it's fair to say I have become more of a mentor myself.

I've had support over the years from various people within the company, namely former managers who have advised me, certainly back in the earlier days of setting up the wood shop. But now, it's fair to say I have become more of a mentor myself.

I've taught various apprentices over the years. I enjoy doing that, but I do tell them that they need to be

willing, and that they need to listen. It can take up to five months to learn and practice all the skills required in the wood shop, so they do need to concentrate!

They also need to be prepared for what they may find in the wood. As it's a living, breathing material it is also home to some unwanted visitors; I've found wood worm, and even bullets in wood back in the day. That's what keeps it interesting!

Greatest Achievement

I was recently asked to produce a mobile phone holder by the marketing team as a customer giveaway for a campaign they have in the pipeline. I really enjoyed this process.

From figuring out the correct sizing, angles, finish and branding the piece, it certainly kept me thinking about finding the best way of producing exactly what the team wanted.

I found it very challenging, but it was a nice challenge to have and I'm really proud of the finished article. It's great to think that there will be a little piece of my craftsmanship on each customer's desk.

A former colleague also asked me to make a wooden BBQ once too. I think initially it was aimed as a joke, but I took on the challenge and made one for him. That was pretty good, I'm not too sure how long it lasted though...



No Barriers

We run the wood shop as a team. The three of us know what we have to do, and we get on with it. As I mentioned earlier there isn't any micromanagement, we are left to our own devices.

I think the management team trust us to carry out the work, so they don't need to constantly check in to see how we're doing. I don't think we would work as effectively if we had to regularly feedback every step of the way.

As each wood block is handmade it can be a long process, but the three of us have so much experience between us that we just get the job done. We can do pretty much anything the customers ask for, within reason.

There is a great working environment here, that makes such a difference to every day. I've been at places where I've felt like I don't fit in, that's not the case here. There seems to be a culture of people who want to work hard, and besides, I really like having a job! I couldn't not have a job, it's not in my nature.

Stuart on the future

Who knows what the future holds? I'm not sure when I want to retire and what I want to do when I do decide to retire.

Although, I do like travelling to far flung places, I like to see the real side of these countries rather than the touristy side. The wood we predominantly use for producing our sustainable FSC wood blocks is called Ayous and is grown in Africa. Now there's a thought♦

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.



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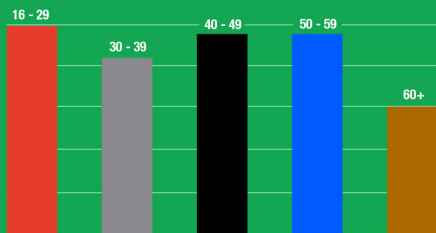
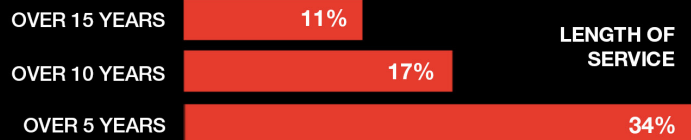


ACTING LIKE OWNERS: SHAWSTON ARE WHOLLY OWNED BY ITS EMPLOYEE SHAREHOLDERS

AS A TRADITIONAL UK INDUSTRIAL BUSINESS, WE ARE WORKING HARD TO INCREASE DIVERSITY AT EVERY LEVEL



A JOB WITH SHAWSTON MEANS A CAREER FOR LIFE



TO US AGE IS JUST A NUMBER OUR DIVERSE TEAM OFFERS THE BEST BALANCE OF FRESH THINKING ALONGSIDE LEARNED WISDOM AND EXPERIENCE



CAREER PROGRESSION IS THE NORM, NOT THE EXCEPTION

26%

OF PEOPLE HAVE PROGRESSED ROLES IN THE LAST 2 YEARS

If you want to be a company owner not just an employee, and are interested in a career at Shawston, contact us on: hr@shawston.co.uk