



OP, OP AND AWAY WITH GARETH THOMASON

Two decades working in both sales and operational roles meant that Gareth Thomason was the perfect choice for Shawston as the new Operations Director. But with a career rooted in big corporates, why did Gareth decide to join an independent, employee-owned business?

Gareth Thomason *Operations Director*

Joining Shawston

I had been with Travis Perkins Group for twenty years, with most of my time spent working for CCF Ltd - an independent business similar Shawston, who were passionate about customer service, and had been acquired by the TP group. The similarities to Shawston didn't stop there, throughout my 17-year career, I watched the business grow exponentially, eventually doubling in size in the last 5 years.

When Shawston approached me, I soon became aware of what a great business it is - a place where everybody cares and wants to grow bigger and better. I felt like



there was synergy with my career to date and I began thinking that I could help Shawston in establishing further growth.

I was interviewed over a couple of months by the team at Shawston, and the overarching factor that really shone through was a passion for the business and the absolute "all in it together" mentality.

The more people I spoke to, the more eager I became to join the team. I was keen to bring my experiences to the table to help build on the amazing work that everyone had already done to build a great business from the ground up.

Being passionate about people and their development, it seemed obvious to me that Shawston was a place where I could have an immediate and lasting impact on people, helping them and their business develop.



My Dad made a similar change in his career; he moved from a role in a multinational hotel chain, to a national independent one. When I spoke to him about my plans to join Shawston, he said “You will love it. You’ll be able to make quick decisions that move the business forward at pace and see the impact of those decisions.” He wasn’t wrong, since joining Shawston, I am very much seeing this play out.

The Employee Ownership Effect

I’ll be honest here and say that the employee ownership status at Shawston didn’t influence my decision to join the team – not specifically anyway. However, the company culture really shone through for me, so I guess indirectly it probably did.

Since joining Shawston, I have learned how powerful employee ownership can be in conversations within the business. Employees genuinely have an interest in the decisions being made and the outcome of those decisions. When you can explain to a driver, a warehouse worker, salesperson, or any other role, why you are doing something and what delivering that action can do for the business in terms of profit and, therefore, their investment in the business, you can really see the engagement from the team.

Everyone wants to see positive change and the employee ownership culture helps to implement the change with other members of the team. It is like having an army of owners; when you leave a depot you really believe they are going to push that message forward for the good of the business and themselves. That is so enriching to see.

Shawston Soul

Shawston has amazing principles and processes that

helped make us the market leader in the fire sector of our industry. The business has grown amazingly over the years, and that absolute drive for exemplary customer service is clearly evident in everyone’s day to day activities.

I have been really impressed with the attitude and ability of all of the teams across the business. The way they have embraced new ideas that have been implemented, just shows how hungry they are to continue developing, growing and being the best. I only have to mention an improvement and people want to implement it; the next time I visit I am amazed at the progress that has always been made.

As part of a growing business, my role to highlight areas that will help our growth and implement simple safe solutions for us to develop into the scale of business we want to be over the next 5 years and beyond.

I am extremely confident in the team, and I know that this will be a really easy process. We share the same goal, and our work ethic will most certainly help to deliver change and growth at pace.

Maximising Efficiencies

I have certainly been bitten by the unrivalled customer service bug. It is amazing that we measure and hit a metric of 98% consistently. I’m also proud of the fact that if we do fall short of a customers’ expectations then we strive to understand the issue that has created the setback and focus on how we can stop it happening again.

More recently I have introduced measuring stock outs on A line products as a secondary gauge of customer service. We pride ourselves on our depth of stock and we have a great system in place with our fantastic

central purchasing team to make sure we always have A line products in stock.

I have also started to analyse our telematics and look to determine the best option for us moving forward once agreed, all our branches and drivers will benefit from the roll out. Also on the agenda for review are vehicle types, safe loading strategies and driver training; all essential requirements to ensure we continue on our journey to maintain sustainability and efficiency as a leading business.

Shawston has an amazing sales and customer first culture, however, there is more we can do to make life simpler, safer, and operationally more efficient. Through driving these operational efficiencies our customer focus and sales will naturally increase.

Influence

I am passionate about people and their progression, so there will be lots of changes in that regard. The changes will be driven by the people in our business, through listening to what matters to them and getting them to help implement change for the better. Helping people develop personally and professionally, gives me immense pride.

The main focus will be celebrating the tasks we do, but also introducing best practice across the group. My intention is to start to concentrate more on the collaboration and sharing of ideas. This is in line with our desire to keep things simple - if we can all help to

make a process easier, we should be passionate about doing so.

This means an increase in multi-branch communication via employees visiting other branches to help share their ideas, and learning from what others are doing so that they can implement a similar process at their own branches, thereby creating a virtual loop of continuous improvement.

People First

Learning the Shawston way is massively important to me and a skill I'm excited to acquire. Working for a big corporation is very different in terms of how it deals with people. My passion for people is strong, I have been given many opportunities throughout my career, so I am keen to help and support growth in people where I can.

Shawston promotes a "People First" culture which is evident as soon as you step into any of our locations. I would like to help members of the Shawston family grow and develop, supporting them to plan and manage their careers, which helps us all as business owners.

The people culture attracted me to the business, the big difference at Shawston is that everyone knows everyone's name. I was talking to a driver the other day and he said that the thing he loved most is that every Director would stop and speak to him, ask him how his day had been and what we could do differently. What a great culture to have and nurture as we continue to grow.



The Future

My goals both professionally and personally for my role at Shawston are continual improvement. I see Shawston as a great platform to make decisions and implement them at pace. I love the fact that I am going to have a big influence on how we grow and the decisions I make will have an immediate impact on the business.

I want to help Shawston grow in line with our 5-year business strategy. With that comes a lot of personal growth, development, and responsibility, so I will need to be focused on learning throughout that process.

Having now been with the business a few months, I am also really excited to lead change in our operations towards a simpler, digitalised way of working. I want to look back at a really simple, sustainable business that is seen as a place where talent can grow ♦

Shawston is an employee owned business. This means Shawston is wholly owned by its employees who have purchased shares in the company through investing their own hard earned money. Our co-owners are empowered, valued, committed and full of motivation to take ownership of their various roles and responsibilities within our business. 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.

