

It Can Be Done

A case study of how a 3PL, Sunset Transportation, grew toward success with high ethical standards, hard work, and dedication.

By Lindsey Williams

When I was a child I always had the luxury of coming home from school and finding my dad who worked out of the basement of our house. I never really knew what he did; I just knew the phone rang constantly and started ringing really early in the morning. I also knew it was something that involved trucks.

Now, almost 17 years later, I look around and it's hard to believe what I see. The phone still rings constantly, starting really early in the morning. Only now I am one of those people answering the phone and talking about trucks. I'm also surrounded by over 30 other people who make up the brokerage, accounting, freight payment, and international division of the corporate office of Sunset Transportation.

My father, James A. Williams, CEO, Sunset Transportation, is a very hard working and dedicated man who applies high ethical standards to all areas of his business. He can also be defined as the classical entrepreneur. Obviously ethics and entrepreneurship are not the only requirements, but they are important ones for helping a company grow the way his did. Also, he has always strived to create "an easier way" for his company and the transportation industry at the same time. Over the years some of his projects have included adding an agent program to the company, starting an international division, and incorporating the team system into the brokerage.

Adding an agent division to the company started when an employee needed to move out of the State of Missouri in order to be with her family. In a way, it happened by accident. My father was determined not to lose a valuable employee and therefore developed a plan for her to work from home. Clearly, this was possible with the help of technology and its advancements in the industry. However, not letting this employee go did more than help start the idea of how a broker could work from anywhere in the country by using corporate as a back office: it also established an ethical culture at the company and helped employees gain respect and trust for my father. They were able to actually "see" job

security and also see how flexible this industry really is. Now Sunset has over 16 other offices made up of agents around the country, and this is one of the highest divisions of revenue for the company.

My father is still hard at work on the international division of the company. Over time, as the industry has advanced and more competition has developed, he saw that Sunset couldn't just offer great customer service and relationships to our clients. He saw a need to set the company apart from other transportation companies by hiring an international "guru" to develop an international division. This "guru" helped the company receive an Indirect Air Carrier Approval and Non-Vessel-Operating Common Carrier License. She has also started educating the brokers about international logistics as another option to transportation and another form of service to offer our clients. Therefore, this has helped make Sunset more of a "full" logistics company.

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This, alone, wasn't good enough for my father, the entrepreneur. His newest project is at MidAmerica Airport where he and another company have just signed a long term lease as a tenant for the air cargo facility. My father's goal is to make MidAmerica St. Louis Airport a hub for international cargo. International transportation is no different than domestic transportation in the sense that relationships with customers are important. Therefore my father is going to Indonesia in January and China in March to develop business relationships.

The last project my father has introduced into the company is one that he has been researching for a long time: the team concept in the brokerage. This was something he had heard has been successful for other brokerages like Sunset. He was skeptical though, about the brokers not accepting the team concept, and instead

interpreting it that more business equaled less customer service, which is not what Sunset is known for. In order to avoid this, a compensation plan was developed to reward the brokers not only for volume of business and profit, but satisfaction of customers as well. A marketing position was also created to help keep a close eye on

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where business started lacking and to measure customer satisfaction. Biweekly team meetings have also been helpful and important in keeping the brokers aware of their relationships with their customers.

Overall, feedback from the brokers about the team concept has been very positive. They feel like they are more connected with their customers than ever before and will never be able to let their customer get “lost in the loop,” as we call it. This is because in a team of three, one person can cover for another team member’s weakness. In turn, they feel compelled to learn more when they identify their own weaknesses. Therefore, we always offer to pay for any education and classes that these teams may seek. For example, all three members of one team are taking the TIA Certified Transportation Broker program this winter.

Although my father may have the ideas on how to make the company grow, none of it would be possible without the great group of Sunset employees. They are all willing to accept the changes and challenges and grow with the rest of the industry. Therefore, in my opinion, the success of any company, not just a logistics company, starts at the hiring table. No matter how big or small your company is, integrity and good ethics are a good foundation, especially in your employees. They are the success of your ideas and your company.

Lindsey Williams is Director of Marketing and PR at Sunset Transportation, Inc.

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